

# **In a Voice of Their Own:**

## **Urban Aboriginal Community Development**

**By Jim Silver, Parvin Ghorayshi,  
Joan Hay and Darlene Klyne**

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# In a Voice of Their Own: Urban Aboriginal Community Development

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## Executive Summary

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This paper focuses on urban Aboriginal community development. We draw upon the experiences of 26 Aboriginal people who have been and are active in various forms of community development in Winnipeg's inner city.

The study shows how Aboriginal people have been constructed as the 'other' in Canadian society. The process of colonization caused great damage to Aboriginal people. Over and over the 26 Aboriginal people with whom we spoke referred to the process of colonization as being at the root of Aboriginal people's problems. In many cases their personal testimonies were painful and moving. An understanding of colonization and its impacts is the starting point for Aboriginal people's interpretation of the often harsh urban world in which they now live.

The 26 people interviewed are not only skilled community development practitioners; they have also reflected deeply on their experiences, and have developed a uniquely Aboriginal and very sophisticated approach to inner city community development. As such, they are what Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci called 'organic intellectuals'. They have developed the intellectual foundations of a workable model of inner city community development by and for Aboriginal people.

Many of those we interviewed emphasized that much of this community development work, although not all, is being done by Aboriginal women. It is Aboriginal women who are, for the most part, the leaders in conceptualizing and putting

into practice a distinctly Aboriginal form of community development.

To those we interviewed, urban Aboriginal community development must be holistic. It starts at the level of the individual, and the need to heal. Aboriginal people have been damaged by colonization. Thus Aboriginal community development requires that Aboriginal people first heal, which requires, among other things, that they go through a process of decolonization. This includes developing the understanding that their grief is less the product of personal failings, than of a process that damaged all Aboriginal people similarly. It involves rebuilding Aboriginal people's identity, and creating a pride in their being Aboriginal. The process of people rebuilding themselves, recreating themselves, although it happens person by person, requires a strong sense of community—a community in which Aboriginal culture flourishes—which in turn requires the creation of Aboriginal organizations. Just as Aboriginal people need to reclaim their identity as individuals, so do they need to reclaim their collective organizational identity via the creation of Aboriginal organizations—organizations run by and for Aboriginal people and organized in ways consistent with and respectful of Aboriginal culture. All of this requires the development and promotion of an 'ideology', rooted in an understanding of the historical effects of colonization and the necessity for decolonization. And this in turn requires the development of 'intellectuals' capable of developing and articulating this approach. In this way, Aboriginal community de-

velopment is holistic—it focuses on the individual, the community, the creation and operation of Aboriginal organizations, and an Aboriginal-specific, de-colonized way of understanding and interpreting the world. This is the basis of a form of inner city Aboriginal community development that is inspiring.

Winnipeg's inner city is, by many measures, a deeply-troubled place, characterized by high rates of poverty, deeply-rooted institutionalized racism, a growing fear of gangs, drugs and violence, and a profound sense among many of hopelessness and despair. This is the

view held by those who live in the dominant culture, and it is regularly fueled by the mainstream media.

Yet there is a clearly-articulated sense of hope in the voices of most of the 26 people interviewed for this project. Out of their hardship they have fashioned a unique and holistic Aboriginal form of community development, characterized by a commitment to the traditional Aboriginal values of community and sharing. To the extent that this uniquely urban form of community development can be built upon and extended, the future is full of hope.

# In a Voice of Their Own: Urban Aboriginal Community Development

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## Introduction

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The post Second World War initiatives that led to the idea of 'development' have been widely criticized for being biased and exclusionary. It is argued that development models premised upon the western notion of modernization and unbounded capitalist expansion have predominantly benefitted those who already have economic power (Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2001; Sparr 1994). By attempting to generate economic prosperity within the framework of the capitalist market economy, development strategies have ignored or underestimated the key factors that are crucial for the well-being of individuals, groups, communities, and nations (Sen 1999). Development has become a new colonialism, contributing to underdevelopment which turned the nations of the South into exploitable resources and dependent consumers (Zaoual 1999). Development became a way in which the combination of state interventions, unequal power relations and the economic violence of the capitalist market economy created barriers to human development and freedom (Sen 1999). A growing body of literature questions the binary concept of development and argues that the simple development logic from 'backward' to 'modern' does not describe all people's lives, either in the 'West' or in the 'Rest' of the World.

Disadvantaged groups in northern countries, like their counterparts elsewhere, have been the target of development strategies. What came to be labeled as the key characteristics of underdevelopment in Southern countries—such as poverty, and lack of access to education, health care,

and work for example—also exist among various groups of people in the North (Veltmeyer and O'Malley 2001; Labrecque 1991). Aboriginal people, the topic of this study, are a good example of people in the North who have been living in what came to be known as 'underdeveloped conditions' and have been the target of development policies (Silver 2003; Loxley 1981; 2000).

Awareness of the limitations, disparities and non-sustainability inherent in the capitalist model of development has led to extensive theorizing, as well as differing ideas on alternative development frameworks. That is, theorizing has begun to consider development initiatives that would lead to human well being and freedom, and have respect for groups, communities, their diverse cultures and economies (Sen 1999; Silver 2000; Felice 1997; Sites 1998). In search of alternatives, many have investigated the possibility of creating an economy in which the state and the market participants are accountable to people (Korten 1998; Schumacher 1973; Brandt 1995; Sen 1999; Sengupta 2002; Woodiwiss 2002). Within this context, development strategies have aimed to achieve economic, political and social democracy.

In debating how to achieve a market economy that integrates human rights and development goals for well-being, many have focused on community economic development (CED) and revitalization of local economies (Schumacher 1973; Henderson 1996; Brandt 1995; Korten 1998). There are considerable dif-

ferences among CED strategies<sup>1</sup>, but in general CED involves the continuous process of capacity building. That is, building upon, strengthening and increasing existing local resources (people, finances, skills, etc.) in an effort to generate economic wealth and well-being among community members (Dreier 1996; Fals-Borda 1992; Fisher and Shragge 2002; Perry n.d.:1-21; Lewis 1994; Fontan et.al.1999). CED is about empowering people and integrating the goal of social well-being into economic wealth generation. CED is based on the premise that community<sup>2</sup> members need to gain control of their resources and its allocation to generate economic wealth. The general goal of CED is to benefit those who have been marginalized from the current economic system.

This paper relies on the literature on CED and focuses on Aboriginal community development in an inner city setting. We draw upon the experiences of 26 Aboriginal people—men, women, young and old—who have been and are active in Winnipeg inner city community develop-

ment. We use this case study to enter into the debate on development, in general, and community development for Aboriginal people in particular. First we discuss the methodology that we have used in this project. In the second section, we show how Aboriginal people have been constructed as the 'other' within Canadian society. Colonialism negatively affected, and continues to negatively affect, Aboriginal people: their economy, identity, culture, family, community and well being. The third section discusses how, despite difficulties, urban Aboriginal people in particular have continued their struggles in reclaiming their history and reconstructing their lives. The lives of the urban Aboriginal people who participated in this project provide strong evidence that there is a need to deconstruct the colonial project of development. In the fourth section, the participants provide us with an outline of a workable model of community development by and for Aboriginal people. Non-Aboriginal people have a major role to play in making sure that change does take place.

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1. We must note that community economic development is a term which has been used to refer to a variety of attempts, with different ideologies and by various groups, both government and non-governmental organizations, for fulfilling different goals (Stoecker 1996; Reimer 2003; Liou and Stroh 1998; Dreier 1996; Gordon 1998; Woodworth 1984; Haynes and Nembhard 1999; Ingleby 1997; Marable 1997). Although community development tends to focus on improving the overall quality of life of community members, in most cases this is not possible without addressing economic well-being (Rubin 2000; Sen 1999). Given this, in this research we use the term community development and community economic development interchangeably.

2. Community can mean people who either live in a shared geographic area or live in close geographic proximity to each other and who share specific common interest and values and characteristics (Boothroyd and Davis 1993:230). For instance, community may refer to groups of people such as women, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities who share traits that caused them to become marginalized (Perry n.d.:20).

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## Part One—Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

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Method continues to be a key area of concern in the social sciences. In fact, the discipline of social science itself can be seen as a series of debates between various thinkers on methodology and theoretical perspectives. Schools of thought are distinguished from each other according to the method and theory that they employ. From modernists to post-modernists, to the various branches of feminism, to subaltern and post-colonial theorists—all have developed specific perspectives through which they look at society and its members. Therefore, the question of which method we as social scientists should use in our research, and whether we should rely on a qualitative or quantitative approach, is as old as the disciplines of social science itself<sup>3</sup>.

Scholars of development studies, and particularly those interested in women's issues, have joined this debate and have posed crucial questions regarding the concepts and methods used in the social sciences. They have emphasized the arbitrariness of many conventional definitions and concepts and the fact that many, perhaps most, of our theoretical and methodological approaches in the social sciences have been biased, paternalistic, and sexist (Cole and Phillips 1995; Mohanty et.al. 1991; Wilson 1996; Waring 1999, 1988; Brandt 1995; Ghorayshi 1996).

Subaltern studies joined the debate and threw a challenge to the race and class blindness of the Western academy, asking 'Can the subaltern speak?' (Spivak 1985). By 'subaltern' Spivak meant the oppressed subjects, the members of Gramsci's 'subaltern classes' (Gramsci

1978). Post-colonial theorists' response to Spivak's question was a disciplinary project devoted to reforming the intellectual and epistemological exclusion of the academy. Following Foucault, post-colonial theorists have stressed the existence and importance of "suppressed discourses" and local and particular forms of knowledge (Bock and James 1992; Foucault 1983). Ever since its development in the 1980s, postcolonial theory in various disciplinary areas has attempted to represent the interests of a particular set of 'subjugated knowledges'.

The life experiences of those who participated in this study clearly demonstrate that Aboriginal people in Winnipeg's inner city can be seen as members of Gramsci's 'subaltern classes' whose knowledge and way of life have been disqualified as inadequate and "located low down in the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucault, 1980:82). Therefore, our goal in this study is to uncover the reality as it has been lived by urban Aboriginal people themselves.

Following the current debate on CED, we started this project in the belief that community development in Aboriginal communities works best when it is built on Aboriginal peoples' own understanding of community development, and their vision of what community development means to them. As we discussed in the introduction, too often the recipients of 'development' have been excluded from shaping what development is. Development is imposed upon them. Such forms of development are not likely to be successful.

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3. There are vast numbers of publications that deal with the strengths and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative methods, and the discussion is ongoing (Bryant 1980; Hammersley 1981, 1990; Sprague and Zimmerman 1989; Giddens 1984; Bourdieu 1985).



We start, therefore, from the belief that community development is much more likely to be successful if it is rooted in the reality of, and is the product of, the conscious decisions of the community. Therefore we have wanted to know what Aboriginal people themselves – and particularly those Aboriginal people who are active in Winnipeg’s inner city community – consider community development to be. As Deane and co-authors put it: “The work of community building must belong to the people, and it must build on their own understanding of what it is to be both urban and Aboriginal” (2003:25).

In this study we adopted a new approach and a ‘new thinking’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 1977; Bowles and Klein 1983). We shifted the methodology from information-gathering, where the focus is on the right questions, to understanding relations, where the emphasis is on the process and on the dynamics unfolding from a bundle of relations (Bourdieu 1977). Therefore, we gave primary importance to the experience of urban, and especially inner city, Aboriginal people as knowledgeable agents. They became the makers of knowledge and we did not impose our conceptions of their reality from outside. Here the emphasis is on the process and the dynamics of the unfolding of Aboriginal people’s points of view. As Dorothy Smith states: “We attempt to map an actual terrain. The enterprise is one closer to explication than explanation, exploring actual social relations” (Smith 1986, 12). This type of enquiry “builds in an open-ended charac-

ter. It is like the making of the piece of quilt which remains to be attached to other pieces in the creation of the whole pattern” (Smith 1986, 12).

This paper is based on open-ended interviews with 26 Aboriginal people who are and/or have been active in various community development initiatives in Winnipeg’s inner city. We identified these people by means of preliminary interviews, in May 2003, with four Aboriginal people – two women and two men – who are active, well-known and respected in community development circles in Winnipeg’s inner city. In these four preliminary interviews we asked our respondents to comment on our research proposal. All responded positively to the proposed research project and its method; some made suggestions that we incorporated in the study<sup>4</sup>. We committed ourselves to making copies of an early draft of our study available to all interviewees for their comments; to holding focus group sessions with small groups of interviewees at which the draft paper was discussed and modified as the result of the discussion; and to making copies of the final version of the paper widely available in Winnipeg’s inner city and beyond.

We also asked each of the four preliminary interviewees to provide us with a list of names of Aboriginal people who are and/or have been active in community development initiatives in Winnipeg’s inner city, and who our preliminary interviewees thought should be interviewed for the project. We asked each of our four

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4. These suggestions had to do particularly with the observation that Aboriginal people have too often been the object of studies that have benefitted the researchers, but not the Aboriginal community. They expressed the concern that the research project should be undertaken in a way that was participatory and respectful, and that the project should leave something in the community, i.e., should contribute in some way to the community. They also told us that they appreciated our approaching members of the Aboriginal community first, and in person, to seek their opinion about and solicit their involvement in the project before beginning.

preliminary interviewees: “If you were doing this research project, who would you interview?” Our purpose in doing this was to ensure that those whom we interviewed were people who are considered—by Aboriginal people who themselves are active in and knowledgeable about inner city community development—to be significant people in inner city Aboriginal community development.

We contacted 30 Aboriginal people who were on one or more of the lists provided by our four preliminary interviewees, informed them about our research and asked them to sign a consent form. We interviewed a total of 26 Aboriginal people, tried to have equal numbers of women and men, and wanted to ensure that both people over the age of 60 and those who are less than 30 years of age were represented in our sample. Table One outlines the age and gender distribution of the Aboriginal people who participated in this study.

Consistent with the experience of Aboriginal scholars (Deane, Morrissette, Bousquet and Bruyere 2003), participatory action research (Rahman 1993; Tandon 1986; Hall 1981; Fals-Borda 1992) and the methodology that we have outlined above, we saw as our task to lay bare the

“world taken for granted” by Aboriginal people—their assumptions, and what it is that they themselves find problematic. We used open-ended interviews and a ‘life story’<sup>5</sup> approach to gain access to the “informal” and “inside” world of Aboriginal people and we tried to create a situation in which Aboriginal people would share their “private” views with us. Recording the life stories of those who participated in this project is not just about their personal stories, but is a method which allowed us to understand their social reality as experienced by urban Aboriginal people themselves. These stories have provided us with insights that go beyond the individual experiences. By weaving these personal stories together, we have gained a better grasp of many issues, events and histories behind them. More importantly, from these stories—as the next section will show—a collective voice of urban Aboriginal people emerges that we cannot ignore.

All through this study, following Bourdieu (1977), we have tried to be self-reflexive and understand our own location within the hierarchy of the field. We tried to be aware and critical of our position and interests in order to produce a less distorted account of the social world of urban Abo-

**Table One: Aboriginal People Interviewed by Age and Gender**

Women		Men		Total Men and Women		Age Group
#	%	#	%	#	%	
2	13.3	2	18.2	4	15.4	20-30
2	13.3	1	9.0	3	11.5	30-40
4	26.7	2	18.2	6	23.1	40-50
6	40.0	3	27.3	9	34.6	50-60
1	6.7	3	27.3	4	15.4	60+
15	100.00	11	100.00	26	100.00	<b>Total</b>

Source: Interview data, 2003–2004.

5. Life story is an invaluable means of gaining insights into individuals’ experiences of themselves and their worlds (Burgos-Debray 1984; Sommer 1988; Graham-Brown 1988; Denzin 1986; Geiger 1986).

iginal people. Given our theoretical and methodological approach, we considered it essential that the interviews be conducted by Aboriginal people. We were mindful of the caution offered by Deane et.al. (2003:8), in discussing their own interview-based study of Aboriginal families in Winnipeg's North End:

"If researchers cannot create a relationship of mutuality, respect, and shared purpose with their subjects, then it is unlikely that they can acquire authentic information. In this study, then, it was considered highly important for Aboriginal cultural concerns to be investigated by Aboriginal persons themselves and for them to determine appropriate methods."

The interviews were done by two experienced Aboriginal interviewers<sup>6</sup>. The interviewers offered tobacco to interviewees as a sign of respect for Aboriginal cultural traditions and as an expression of appreciation for their contribution to the research project. Interviewers opened the interviews by asking the respondents to tell them about their lives—their childhood and teen years, their education and work experiences and community involvement—and how they came to be where they are today. Interviewers were instructed to allow interviewees to take

the discussion in whatever direction they chose. However, an 'aide memoire'—"not a questionnaire, but a topic guide that reminds researchers of the topics to cover with each informant" (Barnsley and Ellis 1992:45)—was used. In general, the interviewers tried to seek answers to the following questions: What kinds of obstacles to community involvement did they personally face? How did they overcome those obstacles and become actively involved in the community in Winnipeg's inner city? What do they consider appropriate forms of community development to be? And what would they like to see happening in the future in Winnipeg's urban Aboriginal community, or, what is their conception of an appropriate form of community development for the urban Aboriginal community? All interviews were concluded with basic demographic questions.

A draft of this paper was circulated to each of the 26 interviewees in early 2005, their comments were invited, and two focus groups were organized in early March, 2005, at which interviewees were asked to tell us what they thought of the paper, and in particular what they thought should be changed. Responses to the paper were generally positive, and no significant changes were recommended.

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6. Joan Hay and Darlene Klyne did the interviews. Hay is a part-time student at the University of Manitoba's inner city social work program at the Winnipeg Education Center (WEC), and works full-time with House of Opportunities, a community-based employment agency in Winnipeg's inner city. She had previously worked on a research project that involved interviewing Aboriginal people in the Spence neighborhood, in Winnipeg's inner city, about their involvement or otherwise in a local community development initiative (Silver with Hay and Gorzen, 2004).

Klyne is a recent graduate of WEC's inner city social program, and is now employed at the Urban Circle Training Centre, an Aboriginal Adult Learning Centre. She previously worked on a project that involved interviewing adult Aboriginal students at five Adult Learning Centres in Manitoba (Silver with Klyne and Simard, 2003).

Claudette Michell is enrolled in the Aboriginal Self-Governance Program at the University of Winnipeg. She was responsible for organizing the focus groups.

Sarah Amyot was in charge of transcribing the taped interviews. She has finished her Honours thesis on women and community development and is the immediate Past-President of the University of Winnipeg Students' Association.

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## Part Two—Construction of Aboriginal People as the ‘Other’: Colonization and its Impact

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Edward Said's *Orientalism*, first published in 1978, has become a source-book through which 'marginality' itself has acquired the status of a discipline in the Anglo-American academy. *Orientalism* is the first book in which Said relentlessly unmasks the ideological disguises of imperialism. Said understands Orientalism as an enormous system which regulates anything that may be written, thought, or imagined about the Orient. Orientalism is a discourse, in Foucault's sense of the term, and is always linked to the exercise of power (Foucault 1987). Orientalism is a discourse that systematically produces stereotypes about Orientals and the Orient. These stereotypes, Said tells us, confirm the necessity and desirability of colonial government by endlessly establishing the positional superiority of the West over the positional inferiority of the East (Said 1978:35). The colonial discourse typically rationalizes itself through rigid oppositions such as maturity/immaturity, civilization/barbarism, developed/developing, progressive/primitive. This perception of the colonized culture, as fundamentally childlike or childish, feeds into the logic of the colonial 'civilizing mission' that is fashioned, quite self-consciously, to bring the colonized to maturity.

Said's discussion of Orientalism applies to the life experiences of the participants in this study. The colonial system in Canada started by taking Aboriginal people's land and pushing them onto reserves, then taking away their political and economic systems, denying them the right to practice their culture and their spirituality, and taking away their children to residential schools where they were even denied the right to speak their language. All of this was justified on the grounds that Canadi-

ans were 'helping' Aboriginal people break out of their 'backward' ways. The price that Aboriginal people have paid for this cultural arrogance has been high.

The Aboriginal people who shared their life stories with us use the notion of colonialism, or colonization, to explain what happened to them, their families, their identities, their spiritualities, their knowledge, and their communities. They are critical of state policies and believe that various state apparatuses were systematically used to degrade and erode their way of being in the name of 'civilizing' them. The residential schools, the educational system, the police and legal systems, and Child and Family Services stand out as institutions that played a central role in constructing them as the 'other'.

### Construction of Aboriginal People as the 'Other'

Residential schools (see, for example, Milloy 1999; Miller 1996; Grant 1996) are mentioned as the most painful encounter of Aboriginal people with colonialism. Our respondents expressed to us in a variety of ways that residential schooling was based on the idea that anything which had to do with Aboriginal people—knowledge, education, family, community, spirituality, language, their very way of being—had to be transformed. The residential schools did not prepare them for the outside world, but put down their culture, broke their family ties and, worst of all, instilled a sense of shame in many of them. They rightly call themselves "residential school survivors". Residential school was a transformative experience for many Aboriginal people. In the words of one person, Joseph<sup>7</sup>, it:

“...produced individuals with new personalities” [our emphasis]. You “never know who you are, there was a lost identity, and I speak really about myself. I didn’t know who I was... consequently I was in no man’s land when I came out of residential school.”

Educational institutions have continued to be a problem for Aboriginal peoples. Even for those who did not go to residential schools, their educational experience was often a negative one. By the 1960s and 1970s Aboriginal children were growing up in Winnipeg, and although they may not have experienced residential school, their lives continued to be difficult.

In general, the participants in this study stress a number of key issues that have been crucial in shaping their lives and constructing them as the ‘other’. They talk about the negative impact of residential school, not being prepared for urban life, loss of family and community, loss of identity and the pain of racism.

### **Lack of Urban Life Skills**

Both old and young generations, as well as those who went to residential and non-residential schools, complain that they were not given the proper skills to live in an urban setting. One of the participants, Jean, spent 15 years at the Pine Creek Residential School—she had been orphaned and went into the school at age 3, with her 5 year old sister. When she left “...there was nothing, no training, no preparation whatsoever in the school to prepare you for the outside world. So when I turned 18 the Principal said, ‘here’s a dollar, and here’s a change of clothes, now hit the road’. That was the exact word, ‘hit the road’.”

She added:

“I had no idea where I was going; I knew nothing, because during the time that I was in the Residential School I had no contact with White society whatsoever, except the nuns and the priests in the school. I never went to a store, I never had a dollar in my hand to go and buy myself something. And I didn’t realize until after I left there that ‘I knew nothing of the outside world’. And I’m looking around wondering where I’m gonna go, what I’m gonna do, but I know that I had to find work.... So I hit the highway... a truck was coming... this fellow that was hauling the fish....”

Those who came out of residential school were sent to a world that was not theirs and was hostile to them. Another respondent, Joseph, states that residential school survivors:

“...came out and were set adrift, not really belonging in a White world, where it was full of tensions, full of competition, discrimination....”

Lack of urban, industrial life skills continues to be a problem for Aboriginal people. There is a material basis for urban Aboriginal deprivation. Charles states:

“We weren’t able to kind of provide for ourselves in the same way like our parents were, right. Like our parents, they did a lot of sort of menial labour work... but for us we were sort of a new wave of people that were trying to survive in the inner city....”

He then makes the insightful and powerful observation that: “...the economy’s always sort of playing around with who we are and what we’re about... all issues, I think, are related to the economic relations

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7. We have used pseudonyms for each of the 26 people interviewed.

we have in this society. But the economy has a way of turning that around and making the personal issues of oppression and, you know, all those things, dominance, to be our own....” In other words, what was caused by the economy *appears* to have been caused by *personal* faults and failings.

William describes this process. He was working up north in 1961 when a “...lot of Indian people were starting for the first time to move into the city in greater numbers...” because of the breakdown in the North in the old system. It was hard for Aboriginal people moving to the city to adjust. The dominant society has had centuries to learn to live in their ways, but for Aboriginal people “...suddenly we found ourselves in a whole new environment.... We were more strangers in our own land than people who came from Europe or from other places....” Immigrants had skills and cultural knowledge to enable them to live in systems that were not all that different from what they had grown used to, “...whereas we as Indian people had lived in a completely different system.... I believe you have to learn to cope in a system, then you have to learn the skills of organization and you have to have confidence you can do it.” The sudden transition from a land-based hunting and gathering economy to an industrial economy—a transition that *all* peoples have found to be difficult (see, for example, Thompson 1967)—combined with the effects of Aboriginal people having been told repeatedly that they were inferior, have made the adjustment exceptionally difficult.

The above statement is not to imply that Aboriginal people living in the country were not used to hard work. They were. Mary, now in her late 50s, observes that Aboriginal people of an older generation

came from hard-working families and had a solid work ethic. John who is in his 60s describes how his mother, who had five children, “...pounded into our heads that we should never, ever get on welfare. She said, ‘you get out there’, and right from the time we were ten years old we were working already.” Many of the older generation of urban Aboriginal people say this. Their parents and grandparents worked *very* hard at many different jobs, and were skilled at patching together a livelihood and running a household in the bush. But these skills were not marketable when they came to the city, and there have been few programs to help them to make the transition from rural to urban life. In a recent study (Hanselman 2003:5) the Canada West Foundation observed that: “Urban Aboriginal transition programs receive less than five cents for every dollar spent on immigrant settlement and transition.” Without help, making the adjustment to urban industrial life with little education or other preparation was tough. People began to fail to get jobs, and had to go on social assistance. A downward spiral then began, with children growing up in families on social assistance and taking that for granted, just as earlier Aboriginal children had taken hard work for granted. Some of our older participants, John and Mary for example, are *dismayed* by this change in attitude. Aboriginal people had pride in their independence when living on the land; the hardships of urban life have eaten away at that pride.

### **Destruction of Family Ties**

The Canadian government’s deliberate strategy from the late 19th and for most of the 20th centuries as regards Aboriginal people was assimilation—to take Aboriginal people out of their traditional way of life and absorb them into the dominant,

European-based culture of the Canadian mainstream. The residential schools played a central role in this, and a sadly destructive role, by their deliberate and conscious attempt to separate Aboriginal children from their families in order to prevent their learning Aboriginal ways of life. The strategy was to ‘take the Indian out of the child’. The consequences for many Aboriginal families—literally torn apart by the Canadian government’s colonial policy—have been tragic.

Ethel states her views on how institutionalization affected Aboriginal families:

“...lots of disconnection, no connection to the family other than you know that’s your Mom and Dad... but you don’t feel any connection. So at [residential] school was difficult as a result of being institutionalized and then being sent into a home where you don’t really know people... you’ve been away from them for five years and you’ve spent a total of two months every summer... it was more stressful being at home than it was in the institution. So very young I started running away when I got back, when we came back as a family unit, [I] lived in the Manitoba Youth Centre as it’s called now, but at that time... it was called Vaughan Street.”

Joseph adds:

“...our family relations had to be repaired, they were... severed and almost un-repairable... the bonds that tie parents and children were severed at the roots and there was no hugging, no loving, no closeness, no warmth...”

One participant, Verna, grew up in northern Ontario. She and her brother were apprehended and pushed into the child welfare system. She was in foster homes

for a couple of years until age 12. Considered a high risk, she was sent to reform school in Toronto for a while, where she was placed in a “...maximum security holding facility”, then was moved to Sudbury to another holding facility. “All that before I was 16, right from the time I was 5 until I was 16”. She turned to alcohol: “...I abused alcohol and, you know, was crazy for a while too, and then settled down...”

Darlene’s experience was a variant of this:

“When I was 12 I entered the child welfare system under the Children’s Aid Society due to a lot of, uh, my parents were pretty unhealthy at the time... it was just a bit nuts, and my Dad started being away a lot... I graduated from high school while in care, I was placed in a number of different foster homes, ran away from all of them...”

Rose, a young woman in her early 30s, describes how Aboriginal people who have been the target of different types of violence—economic, social, cultural (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992)—brought problems to their homes:

“...my Father was a raging alcoholic, you know, and he beat my Mom senseless, like every weekend, you know, and we were raised up with a lot of family violence, you know, we were raised up poor, you know, like we never owned anything... I recall my childhood, like that first 13 years of my life, I recall each year because I was in a different school every year... I was in a different neighborhood, with a different school with different friends and that is how I have my memories lined up.”

## **Destruction of Culture**

For assimilation to succeed, Aboriginal cultures had to be eliminated. The justifi-

cation for what could only be a strategy of state-sanctioned violence directed against an entire people, was that Aboriginal cultures were inferior to European-based cultures, and therefore the attempt to destroy Aboriginal cultures was a 'civilizing' mission. Aboriginal people have resisted this process, and have struggled tenaciously to cling to their traditional ways of life, but the damage to individuals and to families of this state-sanctioned campaign of cultural destruction has been massive.

Joseph, who attended the residential school north of Lloydminster for 15 years from age 3 to 18, states:

"We were more or less orphans and we got punished if there was anything that we did that resembled Native spiritual culture or traditional practices. All these things were evil and had to be completely eradicated. An imposition of values on another culture, that's what it was... the havoc that Native people experienced in their early adult life... was very severe... two-thirds of my life have been severely affected, negatively affected, as a result of being a survivor of this system."

Jack, who is in his early 50s, a man who later in life earned a Masters degree at University, remembers his early school days and the difficulties he had in adjusting in a school system that did not recognize Aboriginal languages and cultures:

"I remember my childhood having to adjust to a new town, new friends and new schools. On the positive side I met a lot of people... The bad thing about it was that I did not do well at school because when I left Oxford House I was fluent in Cree and so my first experience with school was not hav-

ing, not speaking English and not knowing, becoming delayed in school right off the bat, so I never did well at school. My whole school experience, from the elementary school until I dropped out of the school in grade 8."

Charles, who is in his late 40s, describes the role of the church in defining Aboriginal families and cultures when he was growing up in Winnipeg's North End:

"There was a bus that used to drive around every Sunday and pick kids up early in the morning and take them to different, sort of, ministries or churches and I remember one, it used to be a Zion Church on Elgin and it's still there, the church, it still exists. They would pick us up, and they would feed us, right, you know, feed us kinda snacks and stuff like that... what I remember about it is that, that's the first time I ever seen those milks, those very very small containers, and they would give them to us. It was like a treat, and then they would take us into a room.... The minister or priest or whoever the person was then put down our families, eh, say all kinds of things, who our parents were... say they were drunks, they were lazy... and it was all Indian kids eh, all Aboriginal kids... in that room... I remember little kids you know just crying, literally crying, not just mildly crying, breaking into tears crying, but emotionally breaking down... they would use the concept that, because your parents aren't involved with us [the church], their souls haven't been saved...."

## **Racism**

Racism is, almost inevitably, a product of this process of colonization. The justifica-



tion for the attempted destruction of peoples' ways of life is that the way of life, and those people, are inferior. That assumption, that false assumption, becomes woven into the dominant culture's belief system, and is—whether consciously or sub-consciously—now a deeply-embedded part of mainstream Canada's worldview. Indeed, so deeply-ingrained are these racist beliefs, and so woefully ignorant are most Canadians about the history of colonization in Canada and its tragic consequences, that many Canadians are simply unaware, at a conscious level, of their racist attitudes.

All participants talk about racism and how it has affected, and continues to affect, their lives. Charles states: "I remember as a child, there was a lot of racism, eh, and like more openly.... We grew up in a really heavily racist time, and it was like, openly, you know...." He describes the use of language:

"...common phrases like... called us Indians, called us things like 'Chief', but like Indian was used like a swear word, it wasn't really used to describe a nation of people, it was used to describe, you know, people who were drunk, lazy, you know, all the sort of false images...."

Racism continues to be a daily experience in Winnipeg. One of the things most aggravating to Aboriginal people is that non-Aboriginal people are so frequently oblivious to this. Darlene described a recent high-level civic meeting, where an important city figure said, in a way that was interpreted by her to be condescending and particularly ignorant—i.e., lacking in an understanding of Aboriginal peoples'

historical circumstances — "...I have tried everything for Aboriginal students just to stay in the programs, I think they just need to be encouraged."

"And I just looked at her... and I was just like, speechless, and that doesn't happen often, but I didn't even know what to say other than to look at her, like, 'are you for real? We just need to be encouraged?' How insulting.... It's been difficult for me to sit at the meetings because of the misconceptions, people not understanding what it is, and a lot of the people are older people so they're set in their ways and they've, you know, created this craziness for us to fix.... It's all across the board, like, racism is very much alive in this city...."

### **Destruction of Identity and Self-Esteem**

The belief that Aboriginal cultures were inferior was constantly expressed and constantly acted upon by non-Aboriginal people, and some Aboriginal people have internalized those colonial beliefs, and they carry the pain of their supposed inferiority, and it weighs them down because one needs a positive sense of oneself to cope with the world. Many Aboriginal people internalized not a positive but a harshly negative sense of themselves, which has been constantly reinforced by the racism and segregation and social exclusion of urban Aboriginal life<sup>8</sup>.

Charles states clearly how exclusion and racism affected how he viewed himself:

"...there was a lot of garbage that was going on around us, you know, like I said, a lot of violence, a lot of discrimi-

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8. bell hooks, in *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self-Esteem* (2003), makes a similar argument regarding African Americans.

nation, a lot of racism... what I sort of done, feeling and experiencing this racism and this discrimination and this violence... I chose to, there was no help growing up for me... you know, getting things in life, eh, there was no major, major help... you know there was groupings of us that used to go and look for work, in this end of town, right, and there was this practice amongst these businesses around here, right, that... they would put a mark on the page of the White kids... and they would be called back, but the Indian kids wouldn't... we knew... they were chosen for the work over us... you notice these things, eh, but there's no venue to talk about them... you just see inequality all over the place.... And I don't know at what point, you know, growing up around here, that we began to sort of recognize that, you know, we were different... eventually these things really weigh heavy on a lot of people, they turn to drugs, they turn to alcohol... some of them become extremely violent, like extremely violent.... I remember being really violent as a kid. I just chose to sort of fight... but in a different way. I kind of fell on Main St. for a long time, you know, given up."

Joseph comments:

"I hated people, I hated White people, I hated churches, I hated God, I hated government. These things I hated because they destroyed my

life, brought it to a standstill... no hope, a useless existence with no future in mind and all I had was bitterness and anger."

For some, the burden of the internalization of colonialism manifests itself in a lack of self-esteem, and of self-confidence. Ethel remembers when she was young and carrying "...lots of internalized shame". Another woman, Ingrid, describes her teenage years as feeling "...very ashamed of who I was. I couldn't look anybody in the eye, you know, I walked half my life with my head down, very ashamed of who I was." This is a product of a colonial system built on the assumption that European culture was and is superior to Aboriginal cultures.

A man in his 40s sees how the combination of factors has affected Aboriginal people's views of themselves:

"...our confidence has been whittled by the residential school experience, the reserve experience, the racism, the bureaucracy, they [Aboriginal people] don't have that confidence and that pride about who they are."

These are typical examples of the difficulties that these exceptionally talented inner city community leaders have experienced at different stages of their lives. Despite these difficulties, they have made remarkable changes in their lives and that of their communities. The following section shows how they have rebuilt their lives.

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## Part Three—Deconstruction and Re-construction: Reclaiming Their Lives

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Antonio Gramsci, the Marxist Italian political philosopher, famously upheld the everyday social influence of ‘organic intellectuals’. Similarly, Foucault’s equation of knowledge and power confers a unique radicalism upon the dissent of oppositional thinkers. The Aboriginal people who are part of this study have experienced great difficulty in getting the institutions of power to act in their interests. In response, they have developed their own, distinctly Aboriginal way—conditioned in part by their age and class position and other determinants of social status—of perceiving and understanding the situation and the possibilities of Aboriginal people in Winnipeg’s inner city.

### A Long List of Achievements

The 26 people in this study are working constantly to change their position and that of urban Aboriginal people generally, and in so doing to challenge the existing relations of power. These individuals are part of, and leaders of, a culture of resistance. They are examples of what Gramsci called ‘organic intellectuals’, by which in this case is meant Aboriginal people who are rooted in traditional Aboriginal ways of thinking and rooted in the often harsh realities of Winnipeg’s inner city, and who are using this intellectual framework to analyze and articulate the realities and the hopes and aspirations of inner city Aboriginal people. Like the social relations that have structured their lives, the resistance of these people and their responses to their material conditions are multidimensional, and reflect the complexities of the social relations within which they are located. This means that resistance happens at various levels and takes different forms. The following shows that these organic

intellectuals have been using both tactics and strategies in changing the relations of power and improving the lives of Aboriginal people. Many difficulties remain, but they are engaged in an ongoing process of deconstruction and reconstruction.

Aboriginal people in Winnipeg’s inner city consider the 26 people who have shared their experiences with us to be among the leaders of their communities. As individuals and in groups they have been working tirelessly, at various levels of society. All of them, in various ways, remain active. Both younger and older generations are determined to open spaces for Aboriginal people in Canadian society. They give talks in schools; work in the court system to help their people; do fund-raising; sit on Boards; work with children, youth and women; go to isolated Aboriginal communities; work with Aboriginal people to find housing and jobs; tackle racism; organize Aboriginal people; challenge the state; provide counseling to Aboriginal people to build self-confidence; work with Aboriginal people to learn new skills; organize neighborhoods; do community work; work in shelters; work with Aboriginal parents; develop programs in schools to teach students about their culture and history; plan sports programs; work with street kids; and the list goes on. Through their tireless efforts they have been aiming at all levels of social, economic and political structures. They know that much remains to be done, but their efforts have created waves that cannot be stopped.

A part of their success story is the number of organizations that exist, built by and for Aboriginal people, in the city of Winnipeg. John states that there are now over 70 Abo-

iginal organizations in the city, built because urban Aboriginal people were committed to creating the means to reconstruct their lives. There are differences among these organizations, but some of them are mentioned, over and over again, as having a tremendously positive impact on the lives of urban Aboriginal people. Among the Aboriginal-created organizations that have been successful in identifying problems and organizing and building to bring about change are the following examples: the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre; the Aboriginal Centre; the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development; the Indigenous Women's Network; the Native Women's Transition Centre; the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre; the Urban Circle Training Centre; the Urban Aboriginal Education Coalition; Thunderbird House; Native Addictions Council of Manitoba.

As a result of their individual and group efforts, Aboriginal people have succeeded in opening up spaces in various levels of Canadian society, including Winnipeg's inner city. These achievements are based on 40 years of hard work in Winnipeg's inner city and North End. The Aboriginal population is diverse and this diversity is reflected in their levels of education, occupation and in their class position. In the words of one participant (Jean), "... in 1955, there were 20-25 Aboriginals with grade 12 education, but that started to change". Now, Aboriginal people have made significant achievements at the higher levels of the educational system.

### **Rebuilding Their Lives: Empowering Themselves**

Each person has her/his own particular story of overcoming barriers and empowering themselves, but three important 'paths' seem to emerge. One is the impor-

tance of adult education for Aboriginal people. A second is the importance of Aboriginal organizations run on the basis of Aboriginal culture. A third is parenting as a source of empowerment, particularly for women. A combination of these 'paths' helped Aboriginal people to reclaim their lives and build on their strengths.

### **Empowerment: Education, Training, and Public Investment**

People in this study have what Anthony Giddens refers to as 'social agency' (1991) and Pierre Bourdieu calls 'habitus' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Individuals are knowledgeable social agents who, in this case, reminded us again and again of the colonial role of the educational system on their lives. They know that school has played a contradictory role in their lives. The legacy of the residential schools weighs heavily on Aboriginal people, and contemporary schools are failing Aboriginal students (Silver and Mallett with Green and Simard 2002; Silver, Klyne and Simard 2003). However, these urban Aboriginal people know that members of their community have to get more education. Through education they have empowered themselves and have been able to transform both themselves and—so far, to a lesser extent—the educational system. Certain forms of adult education—especially those with an Aboriginal focus—and in many cases attendance at University, have played an important role in enabling Aboriginal people to place their problems and Aboriginal peoples' socioeconomic circumstances in a broader historical context, in the context of colonization, and this has enabled many Aboriginal people to begin to decolonize: to heal personally, and to develop the consciousness necessary for effective involvement in community development.

The role of education—in particular post-secondary and adult education—in this process of personal transformation has often been dramatic. For example, in the mid-1980s Jack came to the city for health reasons and came across the Metis Economic Development Program run by the Manitoba Metis Federation. “It was a real positive experience for me. Really opened a lot of doors for me”, including eventually a Bachelor’s and a Master’s degree in Social Work and a senior position with one of the urban Aboriginal organizations mentioned above.

Ethel’s experience was similar. She returned to school at age 30 after she and her partner had separated. She knew that, as a single parent, she had to make more money and that meant getting some education, despite “...still feeling the shame of not having the strong foundation you get from your high school”. She adds:

“And that’s where the healing began, is when I returned when I was 30 years old, you know, started looking back at my life, and I was very lucky, you know, I was in the Core Area Initiative<sup>9</sup> with a lot of other Anishinabe people so that environment was conducive to learning, you felt at home, there were other adult learners who were returning after being out of school for 20 years.... I quit at 15 because I couldn’t make it in the high school so the shame... as soon as I turned 16, man, I was gone. So it was 15 years of not being in school. But even prior to that, the school, being so fragmented, and being on the run for all those years there was never a foundation, a strong foundation. But I also know that as adult learners you choose to learn and I excelled....”

Drawing on this experience, she went on to develop a truly remarkable Aboriginal adult education institute which is a leader in Canada in Aboriginal adult educational programming.

Three things are important here. One is the significance of adult education for Aboriginal people, of whom a larger proportion than non-Aboriginal people do not complete high school and have had very bad experiences in high school.

A second is the importance of Aboriginal organizations run on the basis of Aboriginal culture. Ethel said: “...it was at that point when I was 30 that I first started identifying with who I was as an Aboriginal person... so returning to the culture was huge... it was just, finally, a place of belonging.” Doris, who experienced lots of difficulties as a teenager in Winnipeg, finally attended the Aboriginal high school, Children of the Earth. “That’s where I started to figure out who I was and who my people were... that whole healing journey.”

The third is the importance of public investment in the inner city. Ethel went to an adult education program created by the publically-funded Core Area Initiative. She subsequently played a lead role in developing the unique Aboriginal program at her adult education centre—which has had approximately 1000 Aboriginal students over the past 14 years, and has, since its inception, been funded at least in part by tri-level urban development agreements. So the initial investment in one adult education program that Ethel attended has generated a remarkable rate of return, when one considers the benefits to 1000 families—particularly since almost all graduates of her program find jobs (Silver, Klyne and Simard 2003).

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9. A 1980s tri-level urban development program which funded, among other things, a host of human resource programs.

Another example of this is the ACCESS program, which provides a range of supports to Aboriginal and other students to enable them to attend and succeed at university. Significant numbers of Aboriginal people, most attending as mature students, have now graduated with university degrees. As Agatha observes: "...one reason that things are beginning to change too is that many Aboriginal people now have gone through post-secondary education.... These people are often the spokespersons, you know, and they are very smart and they are very vocal and they are very articulate and they are demanding changes...."

And as Aboriginal people have begun to attend university in growing numbers, their consciousness has been raised by the experience. Attendance at university enabled many of the people that we interviewed to see the bigger picture, to situate their personal grief in the social context of the historical process and impact of colonization. Richard, who grew up poor in Winnipeg's North End, put it this way: "One of the things that happened to me—and I think that happened to many of the people who started to go to University—we started to develop a stronger analysis or a stronger sense of who we were, and a stronger sense of our rights and our responsibilities that went along with that. And so very early on we started to look at developing things that would be helpful for us and for our community."

Jean, who herself had only grade 6 from the Residential School—"they only had up to grade 6 in the school, so I never went any further than that"—talked about being at the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre (IMFC) in the 1950s and 1960s. "I really admired the ones that had grade 10.... I think I only met about two or three people with grade twelve." But the IMFC

began to work to change that. Talking about the early years of the IMFC, John said: "We were organized because we wanted to see things happen, we wanted to see change take place and over the past 30 years there had been a lot of changes that have happened. Just one example, in education when we first started out, I think we had only one University graduate—Verna Kirkness was one of the first graduates in Manitoba...." He described the IMFC role in making this happen: "...when we created the BUNTEP [Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Program] and the ACCESS programs, that was a lot of work that people don't realize was done through the organizations, through the Friendship Centres, through pressure that was put on the government to do something about making university more accessible to the Aboriginal people."

Ironically, an educational system that has failed so many Aboriginal students at the elementary and secondary levels, has produced more successes for adult Aboriginal students—both at the post-secondary level and in adult education, including the outstanding Adult Learning Centres in Winnipeg (see Silver, Klyne and Simard 2003). The success of this 'second chance' level of education is in large part attributable to its introducing Aboriginal students to an understanding of the process of colonization, so that they have been able to situate their own difficult circumstances in the context of that broader historical process, and have then been able to begin to rebuild their lives on the basis of a growing pride in their Aboriginal identity.

### **Aboriginal Organizations and Empowerment**

For some of our respondents it was not formal education, but rather the education

that comes with involvement in organizations created by and for Aboriginal people, that played the key role in deconstruction of colonialism and reconstruction based on a renewed pride in Aboriginal identity.

Jean remembers attending an Indian-Metis Conference with her uncle in the early 1950s, shortly after the birth of her third child. She was a woman who, after 15 years in the residential school, hardly ever spoke to anyone. She states: "My husband always said I was very shy and quiet, and I hardly said anything for the first three years we were married." But that would change with her introduction to Aboriginal people meeting collectively to deal with their issues.

"I went with my uncle because he wasn't sure where he was going... and I got really interested, and you know the best part about that is I felt really good because here were my people. I'm talking to people that I know. I can talk to people that speak the same language, you know, and then I found out what they were going to be doing and I said, 'I'd sure like to help'. And that's how I got to be involved in the organizing of the first Friendship Centre in Winnipeg.... I helped organize the whole Friendship Centre, get it started, get it off the ground, encouraged other Aboriginal people...."

John tells a similar story. He came from a small Metis community in Manitoba's Interlake, where there was a vibrant community organizational life in which he was involved:

"Well, I started getting involved when I was in my home town... and I remember the very first meeting, public meeting I ever went to. My mother dragged us to this meeting to listen to,

of all people, John Diefenbaker, came to our community to talk to the people and I remember going to the meeting there and that kind of stuck in my mind about getting involved in the community and of course our community was very well organized in those days. We had Boy Scouts, Girl Guides — we had all kinds of activities, some of which we organized ourselves, a lot of which were organized through the school and the church. The church played a pretty big role in our community when I was growing up so we were always involved in some community activity or other... and we volunteered mostly, we never looked at it as volunteering, it was almost part of our responsibility to do stuff. So that's how I got my first taste of getting involved in community work...."

He came to Winnipeg and got involved in the 1960s with the Company of Young Canadians. The CYC started organizing individual Friendship Centres into a provincial organization called the Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres, and in doing this he worked with a group of other young Aboriginal activists, including Louise Chippeway, Ovide Mercredi, Phil Fontaine, Harold Harper, Dorothy Betz and Percy Bird. He describes things this way:

"...at that time they used to have Indian-Metis conferences here at the Royal Alexandra Hotel and they were run mostly by social workers, bureaucrats, church people. And so by attending these conferences we quickly realized that there was something wrong, because the White people were doing all the talking and the Indians were just sitting there. So we said 'we better get organized'."

He adds: "...what the Friendship Centre did is first of all it brought the community together, secondly it provided an environment in which leadership could develop, and then thirdly it provided a much-needed voice for people that had no voice."

Robert is a young participant whose experience exemplifies the importance of Aboriginal people creating opportunities to collectively talk about their issues. He got an opportunity in high school in the 1990s to work with a corporation—the result of an Aboriginal internship program.

"They had this Aboriginal internship program and I went to work there. And they got all of us to go talk at this conference this one time, the AMC [Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs] Conference. We all got up front and chatted away and it didn't matter what we said. After we got off the stage everyone was like, 'it's wonderful, you guys are leaders of the future, keep going, right. I just loved all that positivity.'"

This young man, who is in his early 20s, got a chance to work with the Indigenous Games and then returned to finish high school. "And then I started wanting to give back a little bit and so I started volunteering with different things. And then this job was available to work in my neighborhood working with youth, and so I took it." One of the volunteer things he did was with Manitoba Youth Career Awareness Committee where he was around elders:

"...like you are around elders or even just people who went through a little bit of roughness and now they are doing okay, they are trying to help you out. They drill it into your head, right. Like, 'don't forget where you came from, you gotta help out other people'.

And, yeah, so they drill it into you, but at the same time they are really positive and they will do anything for you, right. They give you their home phone numbers, if you have any problems—you know, that you are going to fall down—they tell really honest stories about their own problems. They drill it into you. You gotta give back."

Part of the secret to involvement in the community is to ensure that opportunities are created for involvement. Then many will get involved. We should not *assume* that Aboriginal people do not want to participate. Many would if opportunities were created. What is needed to surmount these difficulties, Darlene argues, is "...the resources to support involvement with families in the neighborhood... making it feasible and realistic so that lots of families can attend". This could be done by relatively simple things like, for example, having childcare and food available at meetings so that it is an outing for Moms—they get out, they don't have to cook dinner, the kids have fun—or having a bit of money available to respond to emergencies. Linda gave the example of an old 'beater' breaking down and just being the last straw, when for a couple of hundred bucks someone in the neighborhood could fix it and the Mom could carry on, or paying for inner city people's participation in meetings when they are making decisions. They can't *afford* to be volunteers, and perhaps 'volunteerism' is a middle class concept with little relevance to poor inner city Aboriginal people.

As stated by Darlene:

"...it's hard enough as it is to be involved in things. And if the support is there it makes it easier and really people need to—that's the reality of the inner city, you know. Lots of single



parents, they don't have cars, you know. So it doesn't mean that they don't want to be involved, it's just that there's lots of other things going on. So create those opportunities and people *would* be involved."

This observation is confirmed by the experience of almost *all* those people—now leaders in Winnipeg's inner city—whom we interviewed.

The *opportunity* to become involved with other Aboriginal people in collective Aboriginal endeavors is an important building block in the process of personal and community transformation.

### **Parenting and Empowerment**

In the cases of several of the women that we interviewed, when their children reached school age, they were invited to become involved in the school. In each of these cases, a specific person and/or organization played a key role.

One woman, Donna, for example, tried to register her son for the nursery program at William Whyte School in the city's North End—and was devastated when she was told that the class was full. "But there was a CEDA [Community Education Development Association] worker there... she was a community-school outreach worker and she came and started talking to me and she said 'well, you know what? If you volunteered in the nursery classroom then maybe your kid could get in'." At first Donna thought she had no skills. She had come to the city at age 14 with her mother who, with a family of 16 children, including her, was fleeing an abusive husband in what she describes as "a life and death situation for her". She then went to school: "I was supposed to be in grade 8, and I stayed in grade 8 for three years, passing on condi-

tion the third year." On the third day of grade 10, she dropped out of school to start raising a family, and she and her husband struggled to do so, on minimum wage jobs. But when the CEDA worker suggested volunteering, she did it. "And of course the CEDA worker never left me alone. She got me involved in Parent Council, I became head of hot dog day—put me in charge of money collection and stuff—so there was a lot of trust given to me... *she made me believe in myself* because *I really felt I didn't have skills to offer* [our emphasis], you know. I was a good waitress, but...." But the CEDA worker "...made me believe in me and got me involved in many things. And then my husband got involved—we became founding members of the MAPS housing co-op in the neighborhood...." Before long she was "...volunteering and being on Boards all over the place...".

Then she was encouraged to apply at the Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC), the University of Manitoba's off-campus, inner city social work program, to get her Social Work degree. After her first day at WEC "...I had to take the dictionary out to read, to understand five words out of the first sentence I read. So I, like, cried and thought, you know, 'what am I doing, I can't do this', you know, kind of thing. But I'm determined...." She graduated with her Bachelor of Social Work degree and started working with CEDA, at William Whyte Community School, where her transformation had started. She is now the Executive Director of an exemplary inner city community development organization, operating in the William Whyte neighbourhood in the North End of Winnipeg's inner city.

Linda's path was similar. "I first became involved when they were looking for Teaching Assistants at the school

[Shaugnessey Park School]. I lived in Gilbert Park development, and they were looking for Teaching Assistants." In her case it was a social worker who made the difference. "I was not going to apply for a job there, I dropped out in grade 8 myself, *I didn't really feel that I had anything to contribute, didn't have much self-confidence and those kinds of things* [our emphasis] so she [the social worker] just wouldn't quit, eh, she brought me over the little form, the application form...", and returned the day the applications were due and watched Linda's children while Linda took the form in. She got the job.

And then the transformation began.

"It was just amazing to me. I wasn't making much money, but it was just amazing to me that I could contribute something, that I could work with the kids. I mean, within a short time I was actually... running a whole classroom while the teacher was away, I worked in two grade 3 classrooms and I did community work and I just loved the community work...."

And she was successful in working in the community.

"I remember the first time I phoned welfare and said, you know, 'this is so and so, and I'm a community worker from, you know, from Shaugnessey Park School, and blah blah blah, and yeah, this woman's got five kids and she needs a washing machine'. And like, they gave it to her, like she couldn't get it, right, and I was just, like, so amazed...."

Eventually she, too, attended WEC and earned her Bachelor of Education degree. She became the Executive Direc-

tor of a large Aboriginal community development agency that has increasingly adopted Aboriginal ways of operating.

Another parent, Darlene, got involved in community development initially as the result of "...being a parent with kids in the education system. And really my first sort of community development association was 1992/93 for Niji Mahkwa..." (Winnipeg's inner city Aboriginal elementary school). Layoffs were happening and the Aboriginal staff at the school were going to be laid off first because they were the last hired. Darlene got involved and began to speak out, "...and that was a big thing. It was being a part of something that was, we were working towards, just having the right thing happen. And we ended up succeeding, so there was a reward as well."

Many women in this study got involved around issues that directly affect them and matter to them—for example, their children. This led them to find their real abilities which were buried beneath the layers of racism, sexism and internalized shame that are the product of colonization. When they were presented with opportunities to become involved in the community, and the support of someone who believed in them, those latent abilities came to the surface, and a remarkable transformation occurred. Verna describes her frequent experience of this kind. She says to people in the community: "'Why don't you get involved?' 'Oh, no, not me', you know, *they don't have that confidence, they don't have that self-esteem* [our emphasis], but helping them get on board or learn or do things you can see them blossom, and to me that's community development at its heart."

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## Part Four—Community Development By and For Aboriginal People

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We have already discussed the devastating impact of colonization on Aboriginal people and their way of living. However, the 26 participants in this study fought back and rebuilt their lives and reclaimed their culture. They have become leaders in their communities. In particular, the older generation among this group has been doing community development long before the popularization of the term. For these organic intellectuals, as we have called them, Aboriginal community development directly challenges western models of development. It starts with decolonization; recognizes and builds on people's skills and empowers them; honours Aboriginal traditions, values and cultures; rebuilds a sense of community among Aboriginal people; goes beyond economic needs; and generates organizations and mechanisms for democratic participation. This approach to community development is holistic.

### **Decolonization**

Community development is a site where people learn the true value of their work and how the dominant system excludes them (Freire 1973; Morgan 1996). Teaching the history of oppression of particular groups, so that community members can understand, articulate and recognize the forces that oppressed them is essential (Okazawa-Rey and Wong 1997). This is decolonization; it raises political consciousness (Shor and Freire 1987; Freire 1973). For the participants in this study, Aboriginal community development requires, as a starting point, an understanding that colonization had a devastating impact on the lives of Aboriginal people. By addressing the colonizing agenda and deconstructing the colonial discourse,

Gramsci's 'subaltern classes', in this case Aboriginal people, can reclaim their voices and their post-colonial identity can emerge. Healing is an outcome of this process. Before Aboriginal people can contribute to the collective and participatory process of community development, they themselves need to heal. Healing requires both an understanding of the historical process of colonization and an immersion in Aboriginal culture.

Joseph advocates that "we have to get to know ourselves", because the process of colonization took away his sense of identity. As he put it, you "... never knew who you are, there was a lost identity, and I speak really about myself, I didn't know who I was...". The same idea is stressed by Walter who states: "Culture is a very big part of who we are as Aboriginal people.... Once our culture is in place, people are learning it, they are practicing it, and eventually you are going to know who you are... and we have to know who we are to be able to succeed anywhere...." Along the same line, Ethel believes that healing "...begins first with the person and then it just floods out. It's like a pebble dropping—once that pebble drops it just has an effect: self, family, jobs, community. For our people I think the first thing they have to do is do their own piece... the next level isn't there until that piece is done with—yourself." She adds, you can't get Aboriginal people involved in community development "...unless they've done their own work first. Because why would they be concerned about community if they're just surviving?" This process of cultural retrieval is a crucial part of getting Aboriginal people involved in community development. Aboriginal people cannot do community development without first

healing themselves, and the process of healing involves the promotion of Aboriginal cultures—so that people can regain a positive sense of identity. In talking about one particular Aboriginal organization, for example, Agatha says that she follows traditional ways although she is still very much learning:

“And that’s part of what we do at [the organization of which she is Executive Director] with the women and their children. Because a lot of them have lost their identity and the understanding of who they are, which really is critical in terms of when you do that healing work with people. You know it’s very critical for them to have that sense of the roots and connection and that’s a really important piece in the work that we do in the community here.”

Again and again, in different ways, we were told that the first step in Aboriginal community development is to re-build the sense of Aboriginal identity, and the pride in being Aboriginal, and an understanding of the process of and consequences of colonization. This is the foundation of community development for Aboriginal people. As Jack states: “...if people don’t feel good about themselves as a person, as a Cree or Ojibwa or whatever person... they tend to have low self-esteem and tend to be more involved in negative coping... alcohol, drugs.”

Many problems that Aboriginal people face are rooted in their loss of identity. Ethel describes the sense of shame, internalized shame, that she felt as a youngster; the product of her institutionalization—first in residential school and then in the Manitoba Youth Centre—and the product of the disconnection that she felt from her family and from mainstream in-

stitutions. She describes ‘acting out’, and nobody in the school asking her or talking to her to ascertain that she was a little girl carrying a huge burden of pain.

Non-Aboriginal people are disconnected from that Aboriginal reality. This is a part of the disconnection from the dominant culture, most members of which do not see the *internalized* consequences of colonization. They see the *behavior*, the acting out, but they do not see that this is a product of what the dominant culture has done and continues to do, a product of the disruption caused by colonization. She says: “...it wasn’t until that point of healing that I started truly understanding what colonization meant, first of all to myself, and then to our family and then to our community...” The process of healing, on a person-by-person basis, and the process of community-building, is all part of a holistic process of Aboriginal community development.

Agatha, the Executive Director of an important community-based inner city Aboriginal organization, tells us that the women who come to her organization:

“...are totally disconnected from their sense of self, from their families, from their communities, from their nation. How do we now begin to remake those connections, that sense of belonging that brings some stability, that brings them that self-confidence, that voice...? To me community development work is looking at a healthy community... a community where there is ownership... ‘this is part of me and I belong here and I have ownership of this community as well’. That is critical for our women and children here because they didn’t feel they belonged anywhere in those institutions. They had no voice, they had no

sense of connection. So we have to re-instill that and that's part of how we do community development, of how we build capacity."

Charles observed that at a recent conference lots of Aboriginal people talked about their personal lives. "One of the things that... every one of them said in different ways is that it was our community and being with Aboriginal people and being included and respected and valued that made the difference in their lives." This is community development.

### **Bringing Back the Sense of Community**

Establishing relationships and social ties with others is referred to as social capital. Community development, it is argued, entails building social relationships (Giloith 1998; Wilkinson 1991; Shragge 2002; Silver, Hay and Gorzen 2004). This empowers individuals, strengthens social ties and may also build a united political force. Aboriginal people need, Shirley believes, places and spaces to connect and to talk: "...a long time ago in our communities there were always... places in the community... where you could sit and talk and listen. So we need to somehow recreate that in a way that fits the urban environment." Richard stresses the importance of establishing a sense of community:

"A lot of people who grew up in the North End do community development by virtue of the fact that they come from conditions that are not always ideal. That is, they're poor, they come oftentimes from visible minorities—so they experience racism and discrimination and all of those sorts of things. So growing up in that kind of environment you naturally tend towards a sense of community. So

when I grew up as a little boy and onwards there was a real powerful sense of community in the North End. I grew up all of my life there, so I'm what's called an urban Indian, I guess. I can recall very, very clearly the strong sense of community that existed."

Lots of his relatives from outside Winnipeg lived in his North End neighborhood. They:

"...oftentimes gravitated to one area, and I think that even today that's probably very much the same (see Skelton, 2002)... so that in a block radius I had a couple of aunts, an uncle, some cousins, and then very familiar people who also became in some sense an extended family, and so there was a real closeness... and there was a real sense of sharing... with other people. I remember feeling very, very safe in my community... nothing could hurt me, there was nothing to be afraid of. I could walk the streets at night, could do anything I wanted to do and had no fear about that whatsoever—and that's because of that sense of community that existed."

This sense of belonging generates Aboriginal involvement in the community, states Darlene:

"I think where people miss the mark on involving the Aboriginal community is really creating those opportunities just to get together and talk. I've seen that on a local level, just with our community care centres—people coming to our centres, sitting around, having a coffee, getting to know each other and saying, 'hey, wouldn't it be nice if we put together a summer program for kids', and [her organization] can do that, can support that...."

Others doing Aboriginal community development share these values. They talk

about building human relationships. For instance, Darlene states "...building those relationships, going door-to-door. You know, knocking on people's doors, sitting around the kitchen table having a coffee and building that relationship...." Ethel adds: "...if you want community people involved you've got to meet with your community... come right to your constituents, right to your neighborhoods and get them involved." They are critical of the fact that there are too many people doing community development who stay too much in their offices. Robert says:

"I don't think it works that way, I think you need to find neighborhood people and give them whatever supports they need.... When I... [started working as the Youth Outreach Worker with a community-based organization] I was knocking on doors, right, and the kids open up and they're too ashamed to let me in the house because it's a big mess, right. I was like the same way, right. Walk right in, chat it up with the parents, and then the parents are like, 'you're so and so's kid', right, 'oh I dated your uncle', right. The little kids find out it's my house, that I live just down the street. So I think that's where it's at."

This idea is further stressed by Charles who firmly believes that Aboriginal people need to build on a sense of community in what others have called an asset-based fashion (Kretzman and McKnight, 1993):

"...so when we look at community... look at the value of people, you know, what do they have to offer, what is good about them, eh? You know, you go into the North End or you go into any sort of poor community, you make tea, and people organize around a cup

of tea. They bring cigarettes out, and they share, and you know, those are community development things that we overlook... people helping each other out. Those are things that we don't see as being real strategies that we can change the society."

### **Starting Where People Are, Empowering and Creating Opportunities**

There is a consensus in the literature that one of the strengths of community development is how it focuses and uses human capital. Human capital entails skill, time and knowledge that community members have (Gage and Hood 1997). Community development starts where people are, values local knowledge and people's understanding and aspirations for their lives and communities. There is a conscious attempt made to identify and incorporate local knowledge in community development programs. By adopting such an approach, community development has the potential to foster cultural preservation and to weaken the exploitative power of outside forces (Sirolli 1999; Voyageur and Calliou 2003; O'Donnell and Karanja 2000).

Many of the participants in this study have stressed the importance of human capital. They support people in finding their own ways and making their own choices when they are ready. This may be a lengthy process. Donna states that people:

"...come to the Centre and they look like they are in crisis, and you just need to listen to them sometimes, and they just move—they are given options and they just fly on their own, and some take years. But as long as there is that little movement on their part and stuff like that, we will support them if it

takes 20 years. Because that is what it takes sometimes. You got to get them where they are at, where people are at... You need to let them be, at the point where they are ready, because why put them some place that they are not ready for it. Then they don't make it, and it is like, you know, because you get tired of failing, so you need to wait to see."

She adds:

"...And so long as they are growing and that is where their comfort level is then you stay, there is never any push... Let the Creator do his work, stop trying to do his work for him... Just give the opportunities and when people are ready they will get the strength they need to do what they need to do. It may not be the choice I make, but it might be the choice *they* need to make."

Along the same line William sees community development as:

"...a matter of helping people look at their problems, or their challenges... eventually, I think it becomes a self-building process, and it is not so much you have an objective and you are here... as I say, you have to begin where you are, you can't be anywhere else, but you want to do something and the processes, the process is the product, I think, like it's a journey not a destination."

Instead of being "one great big organization", Jack states that, "we try to learn about the culture of that community". He adds, "One of the lessons that I learned in my work with community people is to do it within their schedule, not my schedule. My schedule might be 9 to 4, 9 to 4:30. But if the community want to have a

meeting in the evening or Saturday, that's when we have a meeting... I learned to do what the community wanted, eh..."

### **Aboriginal Organizations, Aboriginal Leadership**

Aboriginal organizations, that are run by and for Aboriginal people and in a way consistent with Aboriginal values—as we have seen earlier—have been a source of empowerment for all the participants in this study. Therefore, for all of them, Aboriginal community development requires building Aboriginal organizations. This too is a central part of an Aboriginal community development.

### **Growing From Strength to Strength**

All participants reminded us that urban Aboriginal people have formed and run many Aboriginal organizations in Winnipeg. They also emphasized that much of this community development work, although not all, is being done by Aboriginal women. It is Aboriginal women who are, for the most part, the leaders in putting into practice an Aboriginal form of community development. Jack says:

"Over the years I have found... a lot of women have been involved in all these projects, more women than men have been involved in all these projects... women in my experience, they've been the drivers of the child welfare initiative in the last few years. It's because of women the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre was born—women have been a central part of community development in my experience. Men are on board too, but there are lower numbers of men... in order for men to become involved more we need to help *them*

to participate in healing. Also to regain their role, their identity, with the community....”

Miles concurs: “The process that I’ve seen in Winnipeg is by strong leaders, and a lot of the strong leaders happen to be women.”

Their organizing efforts reflect the theme of Aboriginal people running their own affairs, and creating an Aboriginal community development rooted in traditional Aboriginal values of sharing and community. This process has been going on for years in Winnipeg, at least since the 1960s when Aboriginal people began coming to the city, although it is a story largely untold. But even the bare outlines of the story reveal that building Aboriginal organizations has involved organizing and mobilizing Aboriginal people to challenge and to wrest power from those in control.

One of the first Aboriginal organizations in Winnipeg, perhaps the first, was the Indian Métis Friendship Centre (IMFC). John told us that when it started, it was run by “...a White Board, and a White Director... the intent was good”. Within five years they had changed all that to an all-Aboriginal Board and an Aboriginal Director. This was not easy. There was resistance, because at that time it was not believed that Aboriginal people could run their own affairs. At that time it was still not believed that Aboriginal people would even survive. As Jean described it:

“Even in those days the government still did not believe that the Indian people could survive, you know, like they gave us a two year pilot project... 1957-58 we opened the doors... and you know if you sit around and are waiting you kind of hear what those White people are saying... they’re saying that they’re going to go into an

agreement that is only going to be two years because they’ll never make it.”

They did make it, and the IMFC had a significant impact on the development of other Aboriginal organizations in Winnipeg. As John puts it:

“I think when I started back in ’65, there might have been about 5000 Aboriginal people in the City of Winnipeg and the only organization that was doing anything representing their interests was the Friendship Centre. Actually the Friendship Centre was quite a prime mover and shaker in this whole area of development.... The Friendship Centres were meeting places because that’s where everybody got together... that was our connection to the community and the Friendship Centres were kind of at the forefront of all this stuff....”

Now there are many Aboriginal organizations in Winnipeg: “...there are about 70 organizations in the city now that have been formed over the last 30 years and most of them owe their being to the Friendship Centres.”

Sometimes efforts to establish Aboriginal organizations did not make it. The Main Street Project “...was originally a Native organization, [it was a] Native group of people who were concerned that their relations were dying in the back alleys of the hotels there and freezing in the cold...”. One of our participants, Joseph, got involved—looking for money—but the federal government backed off because it was off-reserve, and the provincial government said it was not responsible for Treaty Indians. Somebody at the provincial government said: “Add some White people to the Board, then we can consider funding, then it’s not an Indian Board.” They did, and the Province of Manitoba



funded the Main Street Project, and the federal government followed. "That's how it became funded, at the beginning, but then the Indian people got crowded out and it became a White Board because the money started to flow... People forget that it was a Native initiative."

The Aboriginal high school in Winnipeg's North End, Children of the Earth High School, has its origins in the early 1980s with a series of meetings involving urban Aboriginal people who had been active in the community, especially around education issues. As Richard describes it: "...there was a strong sense that the schools were not providing the kind of education that our kids needed. That oftentimes they were very racist environments, that the content that was being taught in schools was very biased and very White mainstream Euro-Canadian information." The inner city Aboriginal community mobilized large numbers of people in support of educational changes. Several meetings were held involving hundreds of Aboriginal students and youth, who said their first priority if changes were to be made was educational change. There was considerable opposition to an approach that involved mobilizing large numbers of Aboriginal people and challenging a large institution of the dominant culture. There was opposition from within the Aboriginal community. Some Aboriginal people did not want to offend the system. One person active in this campaign says:

"...when we began getting close to the prize we began to notice that our own people... began not supporting us because we were starting to offend the larger system, and the larger system was starting to say things about us, eh. And these people... felt that there were other ways of creating change...

we were doing social action.... They literally told us that we were doing it wrong and we were offending these people—and who we were offending were White people. We were offending the Winnipeg School Division Number One, the senior staff, you know, the Board...."

Resistance by the School Board was intense:

"...because they had their own agenda, they didn't want to see the kinds of significant changes we were suggesting—because it would mean changes to their curriculum and changes to their administration and really those changes being untested. And mainstream systems have a hard time dealing with unknowns and they have a hard time dealing with untested kinds of theories or ideas about how things ought to be done. So there's always a great deal of hesitancy when Aboriginal people or other minority groups approach mainstream systems for changes...."

Nevertheless, urban Aboriginal people in Winnipeg were successful—as the result of a very significant mobilization of urban Aboriginal people over a period of years—in establishing an inner city Aboriginal high school, Children of the Earth.

Like education, child welfare is an area in which Aboriginal people have had many grievances. These grievances led, by a similar process of large-scale mobilization and confrontation, to the establishment of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre—the urban Aboriginal child welfare agency. The Ma Mawi movement:

"...came from the Original Women's Network, and it came from the urban community, that whole initiative to make some changes in child welfare...

there was a whole coalition of Aboriginal organizations... to get some control over child welfare in Winnipeg and we were lobbying government to try and get some of the funding as well as some of the changes to the Child and Family Services Act so that it was more reflective of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal wants and needs. The people who were involved in this movement were people who were just from the community, you know, they weren't... there were some high profile people, but high profile people in terms of their involvement in community development already, people like Kathy Mallett, for example... and Linda Clarkson who was also involved very strongly in community development in the late 70s-early 80s... and Wayne Helgason when he was just beginning to, when he was actually working for Northwest Child and Family Services and he was beginning to get involved in community development and he didn't like what he was seeing and what was happening so he was one of the... first 'system' people who was beginning to get involved. But this whole movement just, just escalated, just took off. It was a huge groundswell because obviously the issue that was at hand was one that affected the whole community—both urban and rural—because all of us had experiences that involved with child welfare in one way or another. So people just jumped to the cause and put a lot—a lot—of pressure on government, which ended up in the changes to the Child and Family Service Act of 1984 and it also ended with the establishment of Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre. That was a community development initiative. That was a very purposeful agenda

that was put together by grassroots people in the community to make some changes to a system....”

The result is a completely Aboriginal organization, run according to Aboriginal values and deeply rooted in the inner city Aboriginal community (Silver 2004). But the creation of Ma Mawi, like the creation of Children of the Earth, required a form of community development that was mobilizing and challenging, and was also rooted in the community and the community's real needs, and rooted in the Aboriginal community development values of community and sharing.

Without this kind of mobilizing and challenging politics, big gains like the establishment of Ma Mawi and Children of the Earth are not possible. This is because non-Aboriginal people, as Miles says “...still have this view that they'll tell us what to do. With the growing confidence we have in the Aboriginal community, we want to do these things now ourselves, and there's a real kind of subtle undercurrent opposing that—giving the control to Aboriginal groups.... We want it now and I don't think they want to give it up.” He adds that this process is “...moving oh-so-slowly.... You can't even really see it's moving, but I think they know it's moving now.” This is the almost subterranean process—invisible to most outside the inner city—that is now going on. It is a struggle. It is a process of throwing off the urban shackles of colonialism. It is a part of the process of Aboriginal community development.

### **Aboriginal Organizations Run By and For Aboriginal People**

There are, in Winnipeg's inner city, deeply-felt grievances about non-Aboriginal people delivering services to and for Aboriginal people, and thus earning good in-

comes from jobs built on Aboriginal people's grief. Central to the emergent Aboriginal form of community development is the belief that this is exploitative, and ineffective, and must be replaced by Aboriginal organizations run by and for Aboriginal people in a fashion consistent with Aboriginal values. Alice says: "...but really, like social work... it's a system of employment, eh... where you're not making a product but you are still administering people's pain, managing people's pain". Another person, Verna, says: "...to non-Aboriginal people we are a big commodity, you know, we're their bread and butter.... I've worked in agencies where, who are they servicing? All Aboriginal people. And that always upset me because... they don't understand them, they can't relate to them. So, how are you gonna relate to somebody if you come from this big middle class system...? It's like talking a different language.... We need to have our own people servicing our own people." The previous respondent, Alice, adds: "...a lot of community development... here is still all about imposing that western, euro-western ideology as if it is the only way—the only system of operating, the only way of thinking." But "...any system that's been imposed upon us—it has not worked. And that's because we are fundamentally different people, we have different value systems, and our value systems are just as good as anybody else's. But because of the racism that's been imposed upon us by the colonizers, we have been led to believe that it's inferior...." She says: "They've just got to get out of the business of Aboriginal people."

Genuine community development involves Aboriginal people solving their own problems through their own organizations. Alice says: "Having control over our own lives... it's the best community development you'll have, eh." She argues

that "...Aboriginal people need to do it ourselves in our way. And underline our values. I mean the paradox is that everyone wants a good life for themselves and their families... but we have different ways of getting there. And our way of getting there is just as valid as a western way of getting there.... If it is not 'ourselves doing it', it becomes a form of 'development' that is tantamount to cultural imperialism...." "...Non-Aboriginal people", Agatha says, need to be "...open to hearing new ways of doing things, and that hasn't always been the case, you know. Because we've found in some situations that some of the non-Aboriginal social workers that we've had experience with come here as 'experts' and they have that professional kind of demeanor and they knew all the answers... and we had to quickly address that with them." In fact, as Richard says, unless they do so in non-western ways, they won't get to the root of the problem, which is the extent to which Aboriginal people have absorbed and internalized colonial views of themselves. This is a process which must start at the level of the individual, and which involves building a positive sense of identity.

Today in the inner city there continues to be conflict between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations over the issue of Aboriginal control—Aboriginal peoples' perceived need to run their own affairs if community development is to have any real meaning. A lot of inner city money goes to non-Aboriginal organizations working to meet the needs of Aboriginal people, and in many cases the staff employed are non-Aboriginal people. This creates a great deal of resentment, and is largely inconsistent with the Aboriginal philosophy of community development, which is to do-it-yourself, with organizations run by and for Aboriginal people and

on the basis of Aboriginal values. As Miles says: "...if you look at all those groups—the non-Native groups—there's a lot of jobs there, there's a lot of resources go there...", but many Aboriginal people believe that soon they are going to have to "...transfer those organizations to the groups they work with". As Doug says:

"Previously mainstream organizations felt that they had sort of the knowledge and the experience and the know-how, of how to work with our people but I think they have quickly come to realize that things are not changing, they are going from worse to worse and that they need to allow Aboriginal people ownership, right, of the resources and of the services. So that's beginning to change now."

But this process of Aboriginal people taking control is very slow. There is resistance. And although "the organizations that have helped us over the years have *not* led to change", those who benefit from the system as it is now, according to Doug "...have their teeth well-sunk into the status quo". But, as he correctly observes, "...good community development challenges the status quo...".

### **Aboriginal Community Development is Not Just About Economics**

Aboriginal community development is holistic. It focuses on the individual, the family, the community, the cultures, the organizations. And it focuses on the spiritual and emotional aspects of people's lives, not just on *economic* development. Thus Walter states:

"So for me, for Aboriginal people to truly succeed, and for the communities to get better... you need sort of a holistic approach to community develop-

ment... community *economic* development is just a small part of it.... When I talk about holistic we are not just talking about education, training, or employment, we are talking about supporting the individual."

There is a danger, we are told, when we equate community development with material needs. In an excellent example of the sophisticated analysis of these organic intellectuals of Aboriginal community development, Richard tells us that the danger arises:

"...[when] we begin to look at community development simply in terms of needs, material needs, and we think that the satisfaction of material needs is going to satisfy emotional, psychological and community kinds of needs. Well, initially it might, initially, but in the long-term it probably won't, and in the long-term it will probably lead to the eventual... colonization of our own people, because when you start looking at just simply the needs—well we need better housing and we need this and we need this—and you attend to those things [but] you don't attend to the underlying issues about *why* we need more housing and *why* we need better health care and *why* we need these things. And why we need these things is because we have been put through a process that has changed us fundamentally, that has put us in a position where we no longer exercise our identity and no longer exercise who we are in a significant kind of way.... If we simply address it in a needs-based kind of thing, that larger system understands that and says 'OK, well better housing is good, right, so we'll do something about that'. But if you say, well, we need better housing with a cooperative strategy where

community members share, that becomes a harder concept for them to understand, but that's a concept that's closer to an Aboriginal understanding of community, an Aboriginal understanding of sharing. And so it gets harder and harder to take the values and beliefs about who we are and incorporate them inside of our development if we simply address the community development from that needs-based perspective.... It's up to us to be able to look at *why* it is those things occur, why it is our community looks the way it does, and what it is we need to do to get back to the basic kinds of values about who we are—so that now you're talking about the values that underlie the community itself, those basic kinds of values, and you're not identifying them as traditional values or Christian values or anything else, you're simply identifying them as Aboriginal values. But what you're also doing inside of that is beginning to make the connections... to some sense of who we were historically and then you're beginning to make the connection to what happened to that group of people historically, and you're beginning to build an *analysis* within the community that understands that the conditions that exist are not conditions of their own but are conditions that were imposed from the outside. And when you do that... when you put the responsibility for that outside of them as opposed to inside of them, then they're able to attack that, they're able to deal with it, and they're able... to work to change that. As long as people have that sense of being wrong, or being marginalized *inside of themselves*, they can't exercise their own power, because [of] all those

things that they've been told about who and what they are guide them."

Economic issues need to be dealt with, but they have to be put in the context of the Aboriginal reality. Doug says: "...I have a concern that all too often community development moves to community *economic* development too fast." Another person adds: "...but those economic issues also need to be framed inside of our own understanding of who we are and about our values and our sense of community and our sense of sharing and our sense of cooperation...." Otherwise, "...the values get removed from the initiative, right, and they simply then begin to act as corporations that make profit and they lose this notion of the sharing that needs to happen inside of any economic activity in the community." But doing this—developing and maintaining a specifically Aboriginal community development grounded in the Aboriginal values of sharing and community—is a difficult challenge, because when you try to maintain those values in an organizational form there is a danger that you will:

"...get caught up or get sucked into that whole, larger sort of capitalist economic development notion... and it's going to continue to be a difficult challenge because as we more and more impact on those wider systems, we get pulled into them, we eventually become part of them. And when we become part of them, we sometimes simply adopt what's already in place rather than make changes to those systems ourselves. And when we do that we then begin to lose ourselves. And I speak from personal experience around that because I've been fortunate in that I've worked largely for Aboriginal organizations all my life but I've [also] worked for non-Aboriginal

organizations... and when I've worked in those environments it's always been a struggle... to maintain my sense of who I am because a lot of the things that are done inside of those systems go against my own values base— personally and as an Aboriginal person. That whole sense of competitiveness and over-competitiveness that exists there is just totally inconsistent with the notion of community and sharing, and so as an Aboriginal person you get lost in that....”

Walter says much the same:

“...when you are looking at community development, you have to first of all have that ability to work together and share resources but also have to work to see the big picture, that you can't just work in one area.... Culture is a very big part of who we are as Aboriginal people. Our ceremonies, our traditional values... they have to become the foundation... once our culture is in place— people are learning it, they are practicing it— and eventually you are going to know who you are, eventually... we have to know who we are to be able to succeed anywhere, whether it's business or in the school system....”

Most of those we interviewed expressed the belief that Aboriginal values— and particularly their belief in the values of community and sharing— must be the basis of Aboriginal community development. The importance of doing community development that is rooted in the Aboriginal values of community and sharing and an Aboriginal interpretation of Aboriginal peoples' realities is expressed clearly by Richard, who states that:

“One of the things that we thought was important—right from the very, very

beginning when we started all of that kind of work— was this notion that anything that we did needed to be grounded in our traditional values, needed to be grounded in our traditional beliefs, and needed to, as much as possible... decolonize the thinking of the people we were involved with. We always thought that that was the absolute, critical, critical piece because when you start community development and you start working... you start building, or strengthening the community... there's an additional responsibility that goes beyond getting what you want to get, you know... better housing.... In asking for those things, we not only wanted them to be better; we wanted them to be Aboriginal. And that to us was the key. Because if you establish them on the foundations of our values and our teachings and our culture, then the organizations that we developed and the institutions and the agencies that we developed would begin to reflect our culture— would begin to look like our culture, would begin to exercise the relationships in those organizations like our culture. And then what would happen is that the development of those organizations, the development of those movements in the community would be the development of our culture as well. So *we'd be strengthening who we are, we'd be reconstructing who we are* [our emphasis]. And we thought that that was absolutely critical because we know that... what had happened before in terms of developments in our community is that they would oftentimes just simply go as far as addressing a need and then they would dissolve. And then some White people would come in and take it over again, and so we'd be right back to where we'd been

before—because we hadn't established strongly enough the sense of who we were or who our organizations were. So that was one of the most critical things that we thought we needed to do. And we had relative success with that, I guess, because we were still learning about our culture as well. We were still coming to our traditions and coming to understand what those things meant and what the responsibility of those things were, and they're huge...."

The form of community development that they are practicing is rooted in traditional Aboriginal values. The use of traditional Aboriginal values as a fundamental part of Aboriginal community development has grown dramatically in recent decades, and is the product of decades of work by urban Aboriginal people in Winnipeg's inner city. Darlene Klyne, in interviewing Richard, mentioned that the new Urban Circle Training Centre building is Aboriginal-designed and features the four directions. Richard replied:

"...to hear that, to hear you say that, just makes my heart swell because what it means is that the work that we did earlier, 20 years ago, 25 years ago, makes it possible for you just to simply say—because you couldn't have said that 25 years ago—'oh, we've got a building that has the four directions'. People would say: 'What are you talking about, four directions, that doesn't sound like it makes any sense to me...'. You wouldn't be able to have that conversation. You wouldn't even be able to build that building unless somebody had established the groundwork. And that's not to say that *we* did all that, because there were people before us that were already establishing that groundwork anyway. I mean,

we were simply part of a wave of people who wanted to do something better in the community."

Even the language, the words, to enable Aboriginal people to talk about re-building their culture and their community along Aboriginal lines had to be retrieved and re-inserted into everyday discourse. This has been an important creative process that has been a central feature of Aboriginal community development as it has developed in Winnipeg's inner city over the past two or three decades. And this participant is saying that a part of this work is intellectual work—building and articulating and making into 'common sense' the analysis of the de-colonization process, for example. It suggests the importance to Aboriginal community development of what Gramsci called 'organic intellectuals'—by which in this case is meant Aboriginal intellectuals who are rooted in traditional Aboriginal ways of thinking and rooted in the realities of Winnipeg's inner city, and who are using this intellectual framework to analyze and articulate the realities and hopes and aspirations of inner city Aboriginal people. As our respondent continues to say: "One of the things that we've learned—certainly that I've learned throughout all of that—is that there's still a tremendous amount of work that we need to do around community development, and part of that work relates to strengthening that decolonization process and to continue to build the analysis inside of the community...." Organic intellectuals of the Aboriginal community are those who have developed an analysis of the process of colonization and de-colonization and of their relationship to Aboriginal peoples' often harsh inner city lives. They are interpreting those lives through an Aboriginal lens, with an Aboriginal world view. It is the development of a counter-he-

gemony — an interpretation of Aboriginal peoples' lives that is counter to, alternative to, the largely colonial views of the dominant culture.

Thus Aboriginal community development requires that Aboriginal people heal and go through the process of decolonization. But healing is not just an individual process — it requires a community, a community that is strong and healthy. That in turn requires an understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal cultures and knowledge, and to achieve this requires the development of Aboriginal organizations — organizations run by and for Aboriginal people and organized in ways consistent

with and respectful of Aboriginal cultures. All of this requires the development and promotion of an ideology, rooted in an understanding of the historical effects of colonization and the necessity for de-colonization. And this in turn requires the development of 'intellectuals' — in at least some cases elders, but not only elders — capable of developing and articulating this approach. So in this way Aboriginal community development is holistic — it focuses on the individual, the family, the community, the cultures and the organization. It focuses on the spiritual and emotional aspects of peoples' lives, not just on *economic* development.



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## Part Five—Challenges, Alternatives and a Future Full of Hope

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Those active in inner city Aboriginal community development face a number of challenges, but they are hopeful about the future. Aboriginal people began to migrate to Winnipeg's inner city from rural and northern communities in the late 1950s–early 1960s. Prior to that time very few Aboriginal people lived in Winnipeg (Loxley 2000). As their numbers have grown and their urban experience has deepened, they have built their own, distinctive Aboriginal forms of community development. The gains that they have made have been substantial and important, and theirs is a sophisticated and holistic form of urban community development. But the challenges that remain are daunting.

### New and Old Challenges

The participants in this study are aware of their communities' achievements and they believe there is no turning back. However, they are aware of the challenges that continue to face their communities. They are concerned about persistent poverty, racism, lack of direction among youth, emerging class divisions among Aboriginal people and the necessity for a collective voice.

Many talk about the difficulties that Aboriginal people are facing in Winnipeg. Alice believes that "...racism is... deep in this culture...". They remind us that many urban Aboriginal people are struggling with poverty which affects their choices and life chances. James adds that the "...vast majority of our people are in the lower income strata. I believe that is probably one of the reasons why people sort of have a hard time trying to do things for ourselves...". James states, "I live down in the inner city and I see a lot of chal-

lenges that the inner city faces. You know – there is poverty, there are young families that are just trying to make ends meet... there are people on social assistance, there are Aboriginal youth there that have no direction as to what they want to do...." Agatha, who works with an inner city Aboriginal women's organization, states that: "...for our women here and our youth as well—who are really, really suffering right now and don't feel any sense of belonging. And that's why we've been experiencing these rampant, you know, violent assaults and also murders in the last few months that have been popping up. The only sense of community that they are getting right now is the gangs. That is where they are getting a sense of belonging and we've got to change it." She is very concerned about the high rate of illiteracy among Aboriginal people: "...there is still a lot of illiterate people, right, because they have never had the opportunity to really go beyond [grades] 4-5-6. Or they have gone through, you know, some junior high and high school but they were kind of just pushed through. They did not receive the supports they needed to address their learning disabilities so they are still very much struggling with being illiterate...."

Violence in Aboriginal communities is a deep concern of the people we have talked to. Verna says: "...I wondered why is there still such a high suicide rate—why 7 youth killed themselves in the past year in this community..." Walter says: "...what is happening out there, you know, youth violence seems to be increasing, you know. Every day you hear about a kid getting beaten or getting killed..." John warns us that, "We've been very, very quiet and very, very silent, yet the problems in our communities continue to escalate and—

ah, not so much in the cities but more in the reserves... and in the poverty-stricken communities where a lot of our people are still languishing in poverty... drinking going on... gang problems and so on... absolute third world state.”

The majority of Aboriginal people are struggling in their daily lives, but a small minority is succeeding, economically and otherwise. This polarization among Aboriginal people is expressed by Walter when contemplating the future:

“...I think we will see a large group that is well educated in leadership positions and I think that we will see another group that will still be marginalized. People that are still in that cycle. I think I say that because that is kind of the trend right now. I think that the trend will continue until the Aboriginal leadership, you know, really sits down and starts working together [with the community].... The leaders have to listen to the messages these people are giving them... the message is strong.”

Class divisions are already emerging in the Aboriginal community. And it is clear from our interviews that some Aboriginal leaders are ambitious in an individualistic sense that, while it might pay lip-service to Aboriginal values of community and sharing, is in fact inconsistent with those values (Hull 2001).

Where a gap is emerging between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ in Winnipeg’s Aboriginal community, John argues it is because Aboriginal organizations—community development and political organizations—are not rooted in Aboriginal values. He says: “...our Aboriginal values and traditions and customs and beliefs are all different from the larger society.... Until we establish our own identity as a distinct

group of people, it’s not going to make any difference.” What he is saying about Aboriginal community development is: establish Aboriginal identity, and take pride in it, as something different; and then build Aboriginal organizations rooted in that Aboriginal identity, in that difference—in the traditional values of community and of sharing.

“I mean the foundation for a lot of these organizations was community... until you live those beliefs, you’re not going to make any progress. But the minute you start living them—that means that you are going to spend a little more time talking to your people, a lot less time talking to bureaucrats and government people. And right now the reverse is the case. We spend all our time talking to the government. ...I know that if we would go back to our traditions and our beliefs and our practices of dealing with our community... we’d go a lot further....”

### **Non-Aboriginal People: Walk Beside Us, Not in Front, Nor Behind**

The experience of Aboriginal people justifies their feeling that there is a divide between them and a non-Aboriginal community that does not want to listen. As Alice states:

“To me that is all I call it—it’s racism. There’s a real divide between, I mean, they don’t hear us. We can say you know, jeez, we should have our own school—and they don’t hear us, they don’t hear us. I mean... they got to fix themselves before they even begin to look at trying to help us, eh. They really have to look at their own stuff, eh....”

Some of our respondents understand this

divide well, and are working to bridge the gap. Miles states, "...and sometimes I consider myself a bit of a bridge between the two worlds, because I spent roughly half of my life in the non-native world and the other half in the native world. And then I guess I came back...."

People in this study genuinely believe, and have indicated in different ways, that they need non-Aboriginal people to be their allies in doing community development. They want non-Aboriginal people to be prepared to transfer some of their power, and to operate on an equal footing with their Aboriginal allies. They want the non-Aboriginal community to listen to them and hear them, share their skills and experiences with them, without imposing their world-view and their ideas on Aboriginal people.

There is no doubt that non-Aboriginal peoples' involvement is sought after. But only a particular kind of non-Aboriginal involvement is acceptable. Agatha put it: "There definitely should be a relationship—we cannot do this alone. Our non-Aboriginal brothers and sisters have to be walking beside us—not in front of us, not behind us, but beside us in this work. But also, they have to be very respectful as well, and open to hearing a new way of doing things. And that hasn't always been the case, you know." In a similar voice, another person, Mary, states, "...I think the idea of partnership is good. But I think it must be a true partnership. And I think that, you know, we really cannot become effective partners until we have some power."

Aboriginal people are asking for allies who respect their values and authority and will share with them their experience and skills. Walter states: "I think the role of non-Aboriginal people should be... from

my perspective, to help, you know, transfer knowledge and skills to the community—that ability to teach somebody and transfer those skills—so rather than helping people they should teach people to know how to help themselves." Another person, Robert, stresses the sharing of skills: "But it's got to be a hands-off role. And like, if it means that an organization takes longer to get up and running and doesn't get running as fast as it would otherwise, well that is what's got to happen." Along the same line, Richard believes the non-Aboriginal community has a "huge responsibility" with respect to Aboriginal people, but that responsibility is different than telling people how to do things. It is the responsibility to be an ally.

In order to be an effective ally, non-Aboriginal people need to educate themselves, go into Aboriginal communities and become conscious of their position and actions. This means, using Pierre Bourdieu, being reflexive—and we have referred to it earlier, in the section titled Methodology. Alice stresses the need for education:

"...I know that there is a role for people that are non-Aboriginal people and it is in the role of allies. And really we need to know, we need to have a course on what an ally is. Allies are not fixer-uppers. Allies are people that will support us, walk with us, walk beside us—supporting us in turning power to us. That is the role of allies, is to turn over their power... we really need them."

It is through learning and un-learning that non-Aboriginal people can reflect upon themselves and their relationship or non-relationship with the Aboriginal community, and can understand their place within this process. Through reflexivity, non-Aboriginal people can learn to be-

come the kind of allies that Aboriginal people are asking for: allies who see that they should walk beside Aboriginal people, not in front, nor behind.

### **An Alternative Relationship With the State**

Aboriginal people have always had a contradictory relationship with the state and its various institutions. On the one hand, the participants in this study are very critical of state institutions. Although they recognize both the power and limitations of the state, one after another has told us: that the educational system has failed Aboriginal people; that Aboriginal people do not trust the system; that the justice system is biased against Aboriginal people; that government programs and policies—particularly those associated with Indian Affairs—are not in touch with the reality of Aboriginal people, and repeatedly betray a lack of understanding of Aboriginal issues; that government has created an ‘Indian Industry’; that there are too many reports, too many programs, too many ineffective and costly big projects, as opposed to grassroots projects; that policies are short-sighted and do not have a long-term vision; and that government has created a culture of dependency among many Aboriginal people.

On the other hand, despite these and other criticisms, inner city Aboriginal organizations know that they are dependent on government for their financial survival. Inner city community development organizations receive their funding from government or United Way or various foundations. They have to apply for funding, and account for the funding that they receive, and meet the expectations of the funders. This necessitates the creation and maintenance of good working relations with governments and other funders.

Developing and maintaining those positive relationships with governments and others who control the flow of funds delivers benefits, in the form of the maintenance and gradual growth of programs that benefit inner city Aboriginal people, and the creation of jobs for inner city Aboriginal people.

### **Politics of Access**

The economic advantages of developing and maintaining these positive relationships with governments often leads to what might be called a ‘politics of access’. Community-based organizations need access to governments and other funders—to those with money. In some cases this means a ‘don’t bite the hand that feeds you’ form of politics. John, for example, argues that:

“...we’ve got so many organizations who have got complacent and comfortable... with the status quo, and nobody wants to rock the boat anymore. If you try to put the government... on the defensive, you know, people in our community say ‘oh we don’t want to upset the bureaucrats, don’t want to upset the government, because they are giving money’, you know, so that’s a real problem as I see it....”

In other cases these economic realities lead to the conclusion that inner city Aboriginal activists ought to join forces with those who allocate the resources, a strategy that most often leads to developing close working relationships with, or even joining, the ruling party—i.e., the Liberal Party—because the Liberal Party usually governs at the federal level where the largest resources are located and where First Nations people have historically related with the state.

The 'politics of access' leads many of the best inner city community development practitioners to be uninvolved at the broader political level. In some cases the lack of political involvement is attributable to a fear of offending potential funders. In most cases it is because the majority of the Aboriginal people that we have interviewed see the importance of an *Aboriginal* community development which is rooted in the Aboriginal values of sharing and community, but do not for the moment see any way of expressing these values at the political level.

However necessary it may appear to be because of the financial dependency of community-based organizations (CBOs), there are serious drawbacks to the politics of access. Most importantly, it could be argued to lead—as one of our respondents, Charles, believes—not to 'solving' the problems of the inner city but to 'containing' them. As well, the politics of access can enable the dominant system to pay lip-service to inner city Aboriginal problems. 'Bits' of money in small amounts are doled out to community-based organizations; these CBOs scramble constantly to get their share of an always inadequate allocation. One respondent disparagingly refers to this kind of politics as "...this shopping spree, you know, getting ahold of these programs when they're put out there for sale, you know, bargain basement sales...". The 'bargain basement' imagery implies the continued under-funding of inner city community development initiatives despite the obvious needs.

But the needs are not met because the political will is not there, and the political will is not there because the politics of access cannot put sufficient pressure on governments to force them to act.

### **Community-Based Organizations Are Not on the Top of the State Agenda**

It can be argued that governments and other funders do not really want to 'solve' the problems of the inner city. Doing that would require public investment very far beyond what is now being committed to the inner city. Richard states: "...there is also a very conservative trend that sets in place today—even with the NDP government that we have—the NDP government is very much a careful government right now...." The current provincial government, for example, although more 'inner city-friendly' than its predecessor, is committed to reducing taxes and running a balanced budget and 'inoculating' itself against criticism from its traditional foes (Flanagan 2003). Doing so increases the likelihood of re-election. This necessitates responding positively to demands from the corporate community that taxes be cut and that budgets be balanced, and responding positively to demands from the public and from powerful institutions that health and education be adequately funded. Once these demands have been met, there is little left for the inner city (Hudson 2004). This is a political strategy designed not necessarily to *solve* problems, but rather to *manage* them so as to ensure re-election. If there is pressure on the provincial government to cut taxes and increase spending on health and education, they will do so. And if there is little public pressure on the provincial government to increase funding to the inner city—and there is not because for the most part the 'politics of access' that is practiced by inner city community development organizations involves meeting the needs of funders in order to ensure continued funding—then they will not increase inner city funding.

And to the extent that this is the case, the *implicit* strategy of governments—or at least the effect of government strategy—is simply to ‘contain’ the problems of the inner city. The result is a constant shortage of funding. As Walter says: “Okay, government provides the resources—but there is never enough, you know, to run a really effective program or programs... the resources are really spread thinly so there’s never enough....”

### **An Alternative Approach: The Politics of Mobilization**

To make real changes—significant and large changes, changes that benefit the inner city—requires a different way of relating to the state, a different kind of politics; a politics built on mobilizing people and challenging systems. This new form of politics seeks power for Aboriginal people, but not power *over* others. Rather, power to enable *all* Aboriginal people to live in a healthy way in today’s world—and to do so as Aboriginal people.

This alternative way of relating to the state sees the virtues and the necessity of focusing on healing and on community, but also sees its limitations and argues the case for a politics that includes mobilization and confrontation—in order to scale up the process of Aboriginal people governing themselves through their own organizations. This is a politics that has been used by urban Aboriginal people, and has been successful in securing big victories—the creation of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre and of Children of the Earth High School, for example. As William put it:

“...we have to get some power and... power is never given, you have to take it and you can only take it by building your knowledge, by organizing, and

by doing things... then they begin to listen.... As long as you don’t have power, you’re going to be disadvantaged, so you have to organize....”

Another person, Doug, says much the same:

“...50 percent of what you’ll achieve will be because there’s really good people around... you know, wanting to help. But the other 50 percent you have to take. You have to define it first, what is it you want... and demand it and challenge for it—take it.”

Existing institutions are resistant to change, and unlikely to change voluntarily. In the case of Children of the Earth, for example, the existing school division *and* some powerful Aboriginal leaders were opposed to the creation of an Aboriginal school. But Aboriginal people mobilized for and demanded change. The new Aboriginal school:

“...wasn’t just handed over to us, as... popular opinion out there may have sort of said, ‘well, it’s time for change and we’ll give these Indians a chance’. That’s not how it really worked. We had to fight tooth and nail for that school, but we achieved getting the school, and it was only through resisting and fighting, fighting what was going on. That’s the only reason they shifted it over to us, because we had numbers, eh. We had numbers of people... it takes bringing people together, you know, to create change.”

The politics of mobilization and confrontation, of collective and militant action, has a significant record of success in Winnipeg’s inner city. Not only Children of the Earth and Ma Mawi, but also the Aboriginal Centre might be seen as an example. Charles says:

“After the Oka crisis, for example, the budgets for Aboriginal organizations shot up dramatically. In the city, here, they developed the Aboriginal Centre. All kinds of resources went there and again, you know, you could see it as a process to cool down the masses, eh. You know, a process to put the fire out, because they knew there was a movement occurring....”

Another form of politics, another way of relating to the state that emerges logically out of the financial dependency of Aboriginal community-based organizations, is the demand for a form of urban Aboriginal self-governance—to create another level of the state in urban settings, which would give Aboriginal people the legal authority to control the allocation of resources. As John put it:

“...in the city here there is probably hundreds of millions of dollars going into the Indian industry, and I am talking about money going through the federal department... through the provincial departments, the municipal government, private industry, you name it—there is literally millions of dollars flowing into somebody’s pockets. We [an elected urban Aboriginal organization] get a small portion of that through the grant we receive. But that is just a small portion, and the difficulty we have is we don’t have any legal authority to demand anything else. If we were to set up a government—our own government, for example, in the city of Winnipeg, with a membership of 70,000 people—and this government structure was legislated by parliament, then all the money that is going to all these different places would come together into our own hands. And we would be able to control our own destiny, we would

have the resources to control our own destiny.... I mean, there is enough money there right now—that is flowing into the Aboriginal community from different sources—to really set our people up in better houses, better jobs, better educational opportunities. We can’t do that right now, because somebody else is running the show.”

Those ‘running the show’ are not likely to voluntarily relinquish their power and their control of resources. As a result, the above participant argues:

“...I think that we are at a point now where there has to be some kind of a movement towards getting more aggressive and more vocal again. I think the cities are in a position to make the loudest noise and to have the most impact, because we have the largest [Aboriginal] populations here. And I know that it would scare the pants off the politicians if they realized that there were 50–70,000 people ready to take them on. And we’re not at that stage yet, but ultimately that is where we would like to be—so that we can have a stronger political presence and a stronger voice in issues that are of concern to our people.”

A major part of the case for such a transfer of power and resources is that the bureaucrats who now make decisions about the allocation of resources do not really know Aboriginal people and their needs. William, who worked in Ottawa with the federal government for some years, says: “One thing that amazed me when I went to Ottawa was the number of very bright young people... who would sit in offices and dream up solutions for people out there... sometimes with very little relationship to reality.” Walter says much the same:

“In Indian Affairs, in the case of First Nations, the people that decide on financial resources don’t know enough about their customers, so to speak... because the government system is so huge and the people that decide on this money are so far away that you don’t really know what’s happening at the grassroots level.”

In all of these cases what is being described is a process of decolonization. It has to do with Aboriginal people taking back control of their lives after many long decades of colonial control. This is a process of re-building. It starts at the individual and local community levels—healthy individuals require healthy communities, and vice versa. It means Aboriginal-controlled organizations and, as all of our participants have told us, it needs to be rooted in traditional Aboriginal values.

### **There is No Turning Back: The Future is Full of Hope**

Although concerns have been expressed about the future, our respondents are very optimistic and believe there is no turning back. Jack expresses his optimism by stressing many positive things that are happening for the Aboriginal community, and that cannot be stopped. He states “Oh, yeah, I am optimistic” and adds, “I see it already happening, a lot of training is going on. Training and also employment initiatives are going on for our young people...” Agatha stresses the changes that are taking place: “I think things are changing because the mainstream organizations and government and funders have recognized that they need to include us, our voices at the table, and they need to hear our views of how things should be done. That wasn’t always the case.” As Miles has put it: “...I was reading some-

thing about caterpillars, how they cocoon and then come out as butterflies. I think—maybe it is not a good analogy—but I think we are budding as a people. We are starting to bloom.”

Most of the people that we spoke to, when asked about the future, responded in *collective* terms—they spoke about the future of Aboriginal people as a people. Most also spoke about the future in terms consistent with the values of an *Aboriginal* form of community development. Their responses were not in terms of personal accumulation or consumption, but rather in terms of community and sharing. For example, when asked what she hoped the future would bring, Verna replied: “Looking out for each other like they did years ago”. Others talked about their hope that Aboriginal people would be more in charge of their own affairs, and would have more hope. When asked what she would like the Aboriginal community to look like 20 years from now, Ethel replied: “...my goal is... that our students are running their own organization. I want [her organization’s] graduates running this program, people who’ve grown in this program.” Shirley said: “We should be running the place! We should be running a lot of the mainstream organizations... [and] we need to be able to take our values with us, in there... you really have to be able to come here and not check your belief system at the door in order to survive.” Linda adds to this by saying: “I’d like to see Aboriginal people taking the lead...” and expressed the importance of “...creating the opportunity for people to feel hopeful, to feel in control of their lives.... I mean community development to me is really human resource development. It’s building people, providing opportunities for people, and standing by them when things fall, or being crea-



tive....” The need to be creative is a reference to the fact that Aboriginal people are different, and some may not want to fit into pre-existing slots in the system. So an Aboriginal form of community development, Linda says, needs to “...recognize who we are, and then build some economic opportunities around our situation and around who we are. You know, some of us are not going to be nine-to-fivers, and so you have to be creative about it.”

Our respondents know what they want for themselves and for the urban Aboriginal community, but want to bring other people into their circle. They believe the

Aboriginal way is the way of the future. As Shirley describes her dream:

“...you know, when I was a young girl, I never thought it was possible. But the elders told us that we are—we are—the people that are going to bring other people out of their oppression. We are going to lead the way. A long time ago I would say, I would go, ‘Oh, that ‘s never going to happen...’. Now I could see it, you know. Now I could see it. Now I go, ‘Wow! Their prophecies are coming true’. ...how much we have overcome and how much further we have to go.”

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## Conclusion

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We believe that listening to the authentic voices of Aboriginal community leaders in Winnipeg's inner city reveals a story that is exciting and even inspiring. A process of decolonization is underway, and it is manifesting itself in a distinctive, Aboriginal form of urban community development.

This Aboriginal community development is rooted in the traditional Aboriginal values of community and sharing. Many of the people that we interviewed believe fervently in these values, and live and work in ways consistent with these values. They see Aboriginal community development starting with the individual, with the need for people to heal—to heal from the damage of colonization. Part of this involves rebuilding Aboriginal people's identity, and creating a pride in their being Aboriginal. The process of people rebuilding themselves, re-creating themselves, although it happens person by person, requires a strong sense of community—a community in which Aboriginal culture flourishes—and this in turn necessitates the creation of Aboriginal organizations. Just as Aboriginal people need to reclaim their identity as individuals, so do they need to reclaim their collective organizational identity via the creation of Aboriginal organizations. This is a process that has been going on for 30 years or more in Winnipeg: the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre, the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, the Urban Circle Training Centre, the Native Women's Transition Centre, the Aboriginal Centre, the Children of the Earth High School, to name just a few examples. The process of reclaiming an Aboriginal identity has to

take place at an individual, community, organizational and political level. This is a process well underway.

All of this—at the individual, the community, the cultural, the organizational, and the broader political levels—is a process of decolonization, a process of Aboriginal people seeking to take back control of their lives after many long decades of colonial control. Their lives have been badly damaged. They have to re-build. This has to start at the individual and local community level—healthy individuals require healthy communities, and vice versa. It has to mean Aboriginal-controlled organizations. And perhaps most significantly, it needs to be rooted in traditional Aboriginal values. Why? There are two reasons.

One is that large numbers of Aboriginal people have never wanted to assimilate and do not want to do so now. They want to live in and take advantage of the dominant culture, but to do so as Aboriginal people working in a way consistent with Aboriginal values.

The second is that an adherence to Aboriginal values is likely to reduce the chances of an Aboriginal elite emerging, and leaving others behind. An Aboriginal form of community development rooted in Aboriginal values places a premium on community and sharing, and this is most likely to keep leaders in close contact with the people. Many of the people whom we interviewed adhere to these values—live them and work in a way consistent with them. They grew up poor and lived rough. They have not forgotten their roots. These organic Aboriginal intellectuals, as we

have described them earlier, are aware of the challenges that they face. Despite these challenges and difficulties, Aboriginal community development—with its strong emphasis on community and sharing and the importance of Aboriginal culture—is a reality in Winnipeg's inner city.

Aboriginal people are building Aboriginal organizations in the inner city—organizations run by and for Aboriginal people, and infused with Aboriginal values—to meet the needs of Aboriginal people. A process of healing and building is underway.

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